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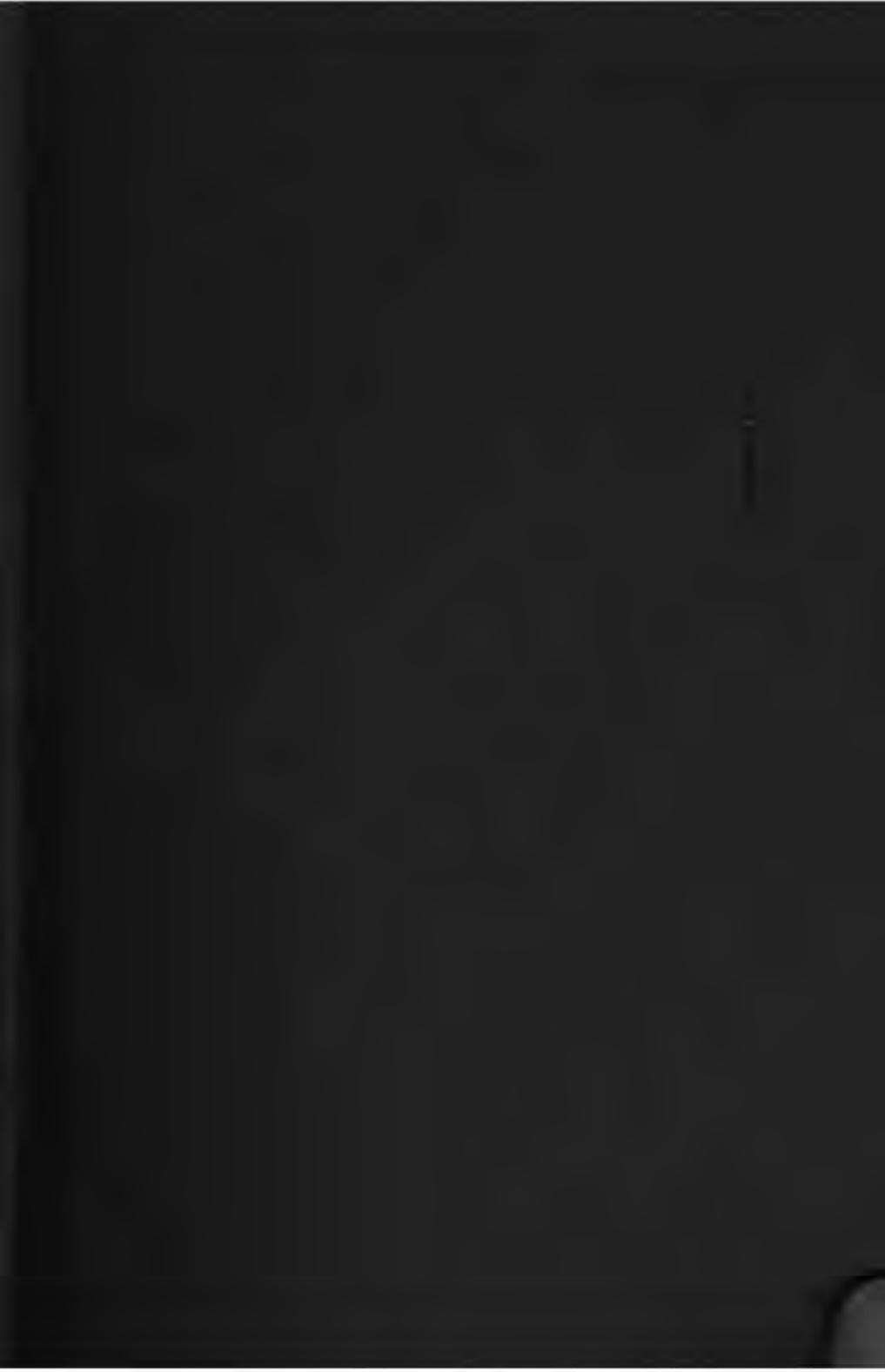
LOVE AND MIRAGE



BY THE AUTHOR OF
"KITTY"

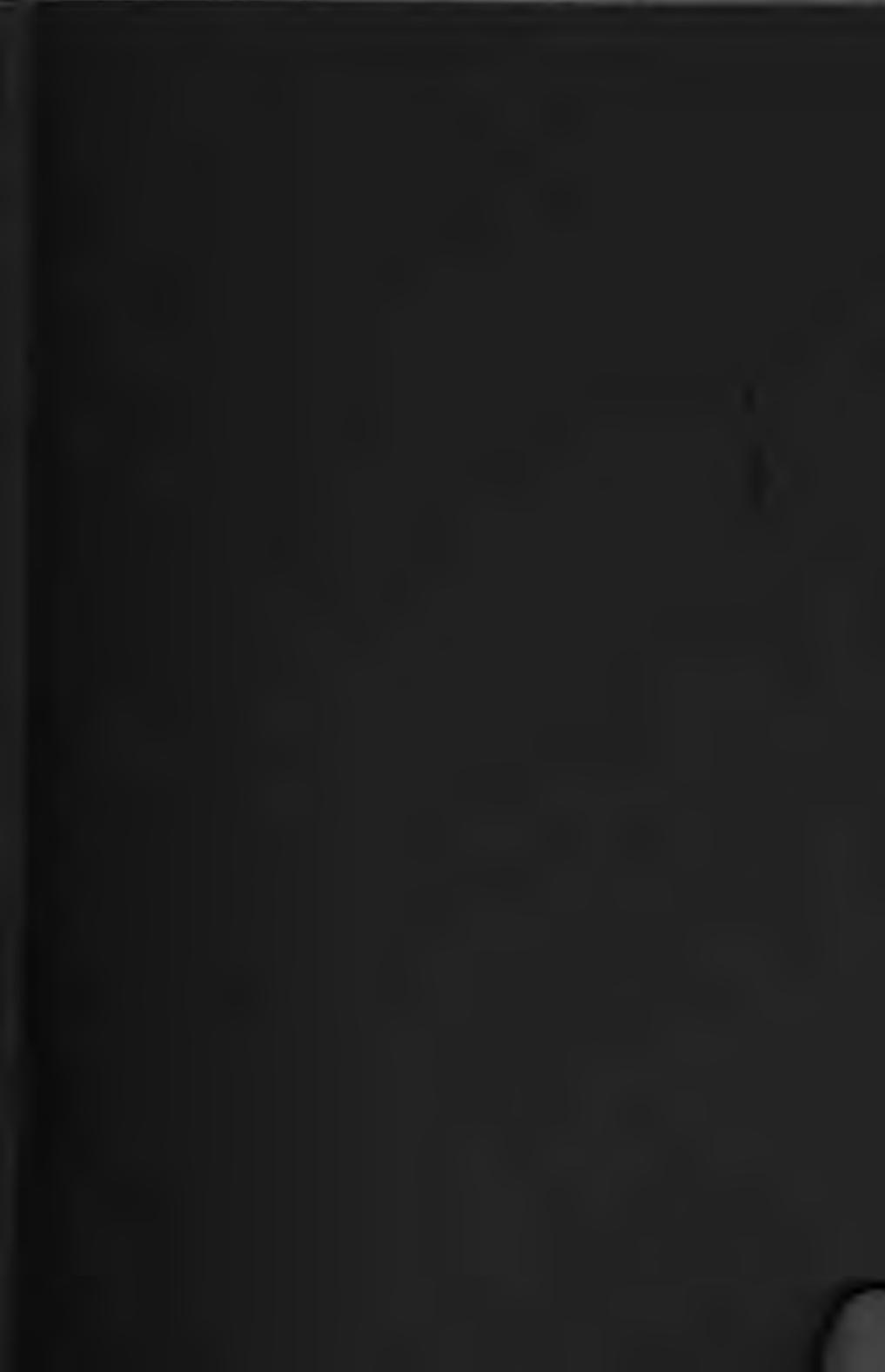


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LOVE AND MIRAGE

OR

THE WAITING ON AN ISLAND

AND OTHER TALES

BY

M. BETHAM-EDWARDS

AUTHOR OF

“KITTY,” “DOCTOR JACOB,” “BRIDGET,”
ETC., ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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LOVE AND MIRAGE:

OR,

THE WAITING ON AN ISLAND.

VOL. 1.

B



CHAPTER I.

THE LANDING.

FREE to roam and free to love ! Could words more welcome come and go in a young man's brain ? Unbidden were they there and unbidden stayed they after the fashion of all sweet guests, sure of approval as the rose and the zephyr. And the happy conviction somehow took possession of Arthur Venning's mind that having roamed so far he should find love. If not here where indeed ? This sunny place seemed made for love and romance, a

little world islanded from commonness or vulgar gloss. As yet he was but on the threshold of it, and what a fresh and tranquillizing picture met his eyes that summer morning, what soothing sounds greeted his ears, accustomed to the bustle of cities! Close under the windows of the little hostel plashed quiet waves upon a green shore, and the sun, as it rose slowly in the heaven, shone upon a repetition of the same scene, far and wide cool grey waters and grassy banks.

A few hundred yards lower down, lay the little steamer which had landed Arthur Venning and his fellow-travellers on this sweet place the night before, and it was with a feeling of satisfaction he now watched it gradually move away in the direction of the open sea. The last link binding him to the world of every day

was broken. Who freer now than he to wander and to love? -

It might seem strange to others, as indeed it often perplexed himself, that a young man so favoured of Nature and circumstances as Arthur Venning should be in quest of romance. He blamed rather the world, whose favourite he was, than himself, that he had well-nigh reached his thirtieth year without ever having fallen in love. Men go a'wooing and maidens are won, it is true, in brilliant circles and great cities, but are hearts ever broken there? Arthur Venning had no wish to break his heart, he only wanted to feel sure that he possessed one; like many another he was rebelling against the monotony with which excess of culture has leavened social life. He would fain taste a little naturalness, breathe a

more ingenuous air. His best years must not be absorbed in coldly gratifying a curious intellect or enjoying an existence no less satisfactory to himself than to outsiders. Lazily as he might acknowledge the fact, it was patent to all. None could pronounce Arthur Venning a failure.

But is not that life a failure which has no passion in it? Yes, said this young critic of life in general and his own being especially. It must be so, otherwise the great poets of all time have but fabled, and poetry itself is a sham and a make-believe; then he smiled at the notion that a man of the world like himself and a frequenter of fastidious circles in London and Paris should have come to this outlandish spot in search of an emotion!

With that smile on his lips, half-satirical, half self-approving, he set about the business of his toilette. After all, he reasoned, continuing his soliloquy, what are the endings of most romances but disillusion and commonplace? The fireside, the home, the headship of a house, are these to be set against a man's freedom? Never. His thoughts were rudely disturbed by the intrusion of a head, with hair the colour of his own, from behind the door, and a voice asking in humorous dismay,

‘*Did* you put in any soap?’

Only a brother could have intruded thus, and, with brother-like unceremoniousness, the speaker was answered by a bar of soap flung at his head. Then the elder shouted, as he went on with the business of dressing,

‘You lazy fellow, I thought you were out reconnoitring long ago.’

‘And I could hardly believe my ears when I heard you get out of bed just now. You were to be up at five o’clock,’ retorted the other.

‘I wish you would make haste and look after a trap,’ replied Arthur. ‘I say, Hervey, I can get a sketch if you will send me a cup of coffee and manage everything.’

‘Sketch away,’ was the good-natured answer, and this careless dialogue nicely indicated the relation of the pair, Arthur’s playfully assumed superiority, Hervey’s as playful submission. The elder brother did not aver of the younger,

‘All thy passions, matched with mine,
Are as moonlight unto sunlight and as water unto
wine.’

A stranger might have made the comparison with some aptness. The two were uncommonly alike, but as yet alike force of character and mental supremacy clearly belonged to the first-born. Arthur, moreover, had a better presence, a finer appearance, although Nature had kindly endowed both brothers as to the outer man. And Arthur had already made himself a position in the world of art and letters, whilst Harvey, of an artistic turn also, although presumably studying law, was still wondering what he should do with himself and his opportunities.

Meanwhile the sketcher set to work in business-like fashion, and the idler went downstairs to flirt with the pretty girl preparing breakfast, make acquaintance generally, and find out what was to be had in the shape of a conveyance. The

people assorted well with the place, a charming rusticity, an ingratiating pastoralness stamping both, not unmixed with a touch of roughness, free, however, from acerbity.

The brothers continued their journey in exuberant spirits. Their cariole was of the rudest; for seats they had only sacks stuffed with straw. The horses ambled slowly over stony ways; but the pleasant little land, the pearly sea hemming it round about, the glowing noon after the cool dayspring! How could they ever forget these first impressions?

And as they journeyed on amid the yellow corn-fields, losing sight of the sea for awhile, a veritable Eden seemed this unknown island under the northern star. There were roses growing in strange abundance before thatched dwellings, the trim-

nest, most romantic imaginable. Surely fay-folk should live in them, said Arthur to his companion. Nor were the golden plateaux between village and village hardly less wonderful ; so had the flowers run riot from one end of the island to the other. It was one vast parterre in the midst of quiet, grey seas.

Lovelier and more surprising still was the last stage of their journey ; for the road led them without warning into the heart of a dense beechen forest, where once more they caught gentle sea-sounds. When they emerged, instead of mellow corn-fields and Arcadian homesteads, there lay the blue waves close under their feet, wooded ways and hanging rose-gardens leading down to the marge.

‘Arrived then,’ said Hervey, turning

over the pages of a sixpenny guide-book bought on the other side of the water. ‘And yonder handsome white house, with the lawn and the lime-trees, should be the hotel. Suppose we dine?’

‘Suppose we do, and we can make out our plans afterwards,’ said the elder brother, wholly absorbed in contemplating the naïve graces of the place. ‘But, my stars, how beautiful! I must go to the water’s edge.’

‘There goes the dinner bell. A table-d’hôte at noon, then? Well, I will go indoors and secure our places,’ Hervey good-naturedly replied.

He paid the driver, and sauntered towards the hotel, whilst Arthur found his way to the shore, five minutes walk only, by white-washed cottages, each standing in its bower of roses. This was the village

street, and the uses to which the fisher-folk had turned their homely dwellings was indicated by the prevailing life and bustle.

Arthur Venning sighed as he met groups of well-dressed holiday makers. The world, if not fashion, had invaded his Arcadia. Yet he admitted that there might be consolation as he caught sight of one pair of blue eyes after another. Where, indeed, should these Northern roses and Northern beauties be found together except under such conditions? This verdant island, caressed by summer seas, was inaccessible during the greater part of the year. It must be taken like a wit, when in the humour. He was about to descend a little wooden stair leading to the shore, when Hervey came up to him, flushed with running.

‘You really must turn back,’ he said. ‘The dinner has begun, and I have secured our places opposite the two prettiest girls in the world. Was ever such luck?’

Back they turned together, Arthur, as usual, merry at his brother’s expense. How absurd it was, ever working himself up to a pitch of excitement about pretty girls, and nothing coming of it year after year!

Nevertheless, when he took his seat he could but acknowledge that Hervey was right.

The pair of sisters on the other side of the table were—well, quite distractingly pretty, thought the young man, as, having bowed courteously to both, he glanced from one to the other.

Blue eyes, silken curls, rosy lips, and vel-

vety cheeks, however, are common enough, and often make up a combination wholly uninteresting. Nothing gives the observer a more irritating sense of waste than prettiness without beauty; but here was a charm independent of both. The look, glance, expression, call it by what name we will, of the two beautiful sisters might have redeemed a downright ugly face; and is not the look in a human being what manner is to a book? If that fails to please, all other graces are vain or touch us coldly. We may be instructed after a fashion, enriched and delighted never.

Like as were the pair in the matter of eyes blue as alkanet, the loveliest blush imaginable, brown hair, and teeth of pearl, there was the same difference between them as between the brothers. The largest share of outward beauty and evidently

strength of character had fallen to the first-born. Just as Hervey was a copy of Arthur, so the younger girl was a copy of the elder; a charming copy, too. One hardly coveted the original more than the picture beside it.

It must here be explained that the Teutonic maiden has little in common with a certain type of her English or American sister. This quartette could now fall into easy, pleasant talk, without need of further introduction than a smile and an inclination of the head; firstly, because such was the fashion of those parts, but chiefly because coquetry is not a plant that flourishes on German soil. The naturalness of the girls' behaviour was due as much to circumstances as to character. They could freely talk with two strangers of the

other sex, because custom permitted, and there was no consciousness of being on forbidden ground to lead them further. And, if not here, surely in no corner of the world could ceremony be dispensed with. Who would be at the trouble of going half-way to the North Pole without perspective reward?

69

CHAPTER II.

‘EYES BLUE AS ALKANET.’

AN introduction of some kind can generally be contrived by those who have their wits about them. Arthur, ingenious of the ingenious, but a stickler by routine in the matter of etiquette to boot, before ten minutes were over, had put himself and his brother almost on the footing of old friends. He recollected that he had with him the card of a well-known German professor, whose pupil he had been at Göttingen years

ago, and now produced it with excellent effect. The lines scrawled on the back were so conveniently worded as to introduce him at any time to anyone, and in any place.

The elder girl smilingly read it, and handed it to her sister; she, in her turn, after perusal, passed it on to the elderly pair, under whose protection they seemed to be.

‘Very good, very good!’

Thus saying, the old professor and his wife—who were evidently kindly disposed towards these well-bred young Englishmen—nodded in friendliest fashion; and, before coming back to Arthur, the card had gone the round of the table, and the question of their respectability was settled. He was now on the point of producing another, but on second thoughts

refrained, at least for the present. The withheld card, thin as writing paper, and having a gilt edge, was inscribed with the name of a very grand personage indeed; no other than that of a reigning prince, commanding him to another, the potentate of these parts, and one of the richest subjects of the empire.

Arthur feared to appear a snob in the eyes of his ingenuous friends; and as yet there were no more difficulties to smooth away.

The rest of the meal passed off pleasantly as a family dinner-party. How wonderful what followed was in the eyes of the London-bred men! For, two or three hours later, they were out of doors, with the two girls for guides; four happy lovers a-maying, in the old ballads, no more natural or pleased with each other's

company. A party of half-a-score quitted the hotel together ; but soon Arthur was leading the way, under the elder sister's wing, carrying her basket ; gathering flowers for her ; feeling on a sudden as if he were young indeed. It was the first time he had ever gone a-maying with a beautiful girl, and the first time he had ever known a woman named Elizabeth. The name, as well as the simple white dress she wore, took his fancy. No fashion, no artificial graces, no lendings here. A sweet woman, a sweet name, a sweet gown. That was all.

‘ What made you come to this island ? ’ asked Elizabeth, when they sat down to rest.

‘ To wait for a mirage,’ Arthur answered, with perfect seriousness. Then he

turned to her, putting in his turn the same brief question,

‘What made you come to this island?’

Elizabeth’s answer was prompt as his own.

‘To fly from a sorrow,’ she replied, looking down at her flowers. ‘Will the mirage come, do you think?’ she added.

‘Will the sorrow go?’ asked Arthur. ‘We must both have faith.’

And as he glanced at the eyes blue as alkanet, that had suddenly filled with tears, he would have given worlds to ask more.

‘They say here that sooner or later all seekers after mirage are rewarded. But there are sorrows not to be charmed away, and mine is one,’ she said. ‘Let us not talk of it. I am happy at this moment.’

‘Who could help being happy?’ again asked Arthur.

The girl laughed bitterly.

‘You speak as if there were no lost souls in the world,’ she said. ‘Can happiness or even enjoyment be the portion of a burdened conscience?’

‘Well,’ Arthur replied, soothingly, ‘thank heaven I have not a burdened conscience, and I am sure you have not either.’

‘Nor my little sister Flora,’ answered Elizabeth, glancing behind her.

‘Nor my brother Hervey,’ echoed Arthur, also glancing round him. The pair were close behind, quite occupied with each other. Elizabeth’s mood now changed and she said, almost in a merry vein, although there was significance in the words,

‘Then you shall watch over your brother and I over my sister to see that no harm comes to them.’

‘As if harm could happen to them,’ laughed Arthur, lightly. Once more Elizabeth grew enigmatic and grave.

‘You may be able to answer for your charge. I cannot answer for mine.’

‘Nay,’ again retorted Arthur, lightly, ‘I can be responsible for no one. Were this island a pitfall of dangers as you seem to believe, Hervey must be his own paladin.’

‘But my little sister’s case is different,’ said Elizabeth, with the staidness of a nun. ‘Beauty is a peril of one kind, youth of another. I must watch over her like a mother.’

Arthur smiled, but did not venture to utter the thought in his mind. If

then Elizabeth so watched over the lovely Flora, who watched over the lovelier Elizabeth ?

‘ I am several years older than my sister,’ said the girl, as if reading his thoughts, ‘ she is but eighteen and I am twenty-three.’

‘ Strange coincidence,’ cried Arthur. ‘ I am just five years my brother’s senior.’

‘ I wish I had a brother,’ sighed Elizabeth, her mind evidently going on another track.

‘ I cannot conceive why any girl should covet such an appendage,’ laughed Arthur. ‘ What good is a brother except to make holes in stockings for his sister to darn ? I confess though I have often envied men their sisters, though not of the darning kind.’

‘I will tell you why I have wished for a brother,’ Elizabeth replied, looking at him with that charming directness he found irresistible. ‘Because a woman cannot fight a duel—that is why.’

Then she blushed crimson, as if accusing herself of forwardness, and talked for awhile of bagatelles.

When Arthur declared that he had come to this island in search of a mirage, he was not uttering a jest. This breezy, fabled, flowery land was the cradle of wonderment and natural marvel. At times, so folks said and believed, lovely cities and scenes would be seen pictured in the sky, pageantry as gorgeous as visited the inner eye of the blind Apoclypt. Nor did the sea offer spectacles less strange and beautiful. On certain days, when the atmosphere was more

transparent than usual, and not a breath stirred the heavens, cities that had been buried under the waves for ages and swallowed up on account of their sins, might be seen, and the stately folk that still inhabit them. Sometimes these phantom streets would present a scene of bustle and animation; at others, their ghostly inhabitants might be seen clad in stately robes, and sitting in golden chariots, or with slow, solemn pace, following a funereal car.

Arthur had read of these things, and, in visiting this island, was realising a plan nursed for long years. Here at least he had said to himself he should see something new and strange.

Meantime Hervey, a finished flirt in London drawing-rooms, found himself at sweet and unexpected disadvantage here. Do what he would, he must be natural,

himself, and nothing but himself. Not a London phrase or smile would serve his turn now. The ingratiating candour and artlessness of his companions made him also feel fresh and youthful. A few minutes after, inwardly smiling at Flora's enthusiasm for flowers, he was gathering them as eagerly as herself. It was verging on the absurd, but delicious all the same.

‘How happy it makes me to see Elizabeth so friendly towards your brother!’ cried the girl, with the naïveté of a five-year-old child.

‘And how rejoiced I am at the thought that Arthur may at last make a real friend of a woman!’ said Hervey.

‘Has your brother, then, hitherto held aloof from our sex?’

Hervey laughed.

‘I was just going to ask if your sister, for any reason or other, felt animosity towards ours?’

‘She has been embittered,’ Flora answered, briefly. ‘Never was anyone born with a sunnier disposition. Now tell me why your brother should dislike women.’

‘Heaven forbid,’ laughed Hervey. ‘He is too indifferent, that is all. I want to see him more in earnest in his likes and dislikes. I want to see him—’ the young man did not venture to say, ‘in love,’ although the words nearly escaped him. He blurted forth, after a moment’s hesitation—‘Emphatic, enthusiastic; you must know what I mean.’

‘Yes, I understand,’ Flora said; ‘and

I feel exactly the same with regard to Elizabeth. If she would only throw herself heart and soul into some new interest! If she would only believe that human beings are worth caring for!—which they are, I am sure,' added this eighteen-year-old philosopher, with eyes blue as alkanet, and the sweetest smile in the world.

‘We will plot, we will connive,’ Hervey replied, enchanted at the possibilities opening before him. ‘You shall lay a trap for your sister, and I will set a snare for my brother. They shall confide in each other, and become fast friends.’

‘Elizabeth’s dream, night and day, is to find a confidant, a fast friend. But it must be some one who is as loyal

as he is brave, and as good as he is loyal.'

'Arthur is all that. I can answer for him,' Hervey answered, eagerly.

He had never been more serious in his life. The girl smiled at his impetuosity.

'It is natural to praise one's brother. If I began praising my sister, I should never leave off. We were all so happy a year ago!' she sighed.

'This place seems made for felicity,' put in Hervey, parenthetically.

'I cannot help being happy wherever I am,' said Flora, with a little remorse.

'But you ought to feel thankful that you can thus exercise a cardinal virtue.'

'Oh! to be happy is not to be virtuous,' Flora cried.

‘I have always believed the contrary. The really happy person must be a benefactor of his kind, since he makes others so.’

Flora reflected.

‘One smile, like one swallow, brings a skyful, says the proverb. Yes, under certain circumstances, to smile may become a duty.’

‘Then we will do our duty in right good earnest, and feel thankful that it is no harder.’

Whereupon each looked into the other’s face, and smiled. Just then Elizabeth beckoned Flora to her side on the rustic bench. Hervey, following Arthur’s example, flung himself on the turf.

‘What have you two been talking about?’ asked Elizabeth, with the authority of an elder sister.

‘We began by particulars, and ended in generalities,’ Hervey answered, quickly. ‘Is it right or wrong to be happy? That is the ethical problem we were deep in just now. And what have you been talking about?’ he asked of Elizabeth, smiling, in his turn.

‘We have riddled as one sphinx to another,’ was Arthur’s reply.

‘May we not hear the riddles?’ asked Flora, simply.

‘Hear them, and be wise! One running after a mirage, one eluding a shadow. What will they find? Or let me put you in a miz-maze more hopeless still. A phantom brother, a dream sister, a suspended sword!’

‘We have been discussing the reciprocal advantage of having brothers or sisters,’ put in Elizabeth, with a sign of

impatience. ‘But why do we talk so much in a beautiful place? Let us go on.’

CHAPTER III.

THE WALK.

WHY indeed? The place was too lovely for prattle. The very breath of praise seemed inappropriate. With deepest wisdom Nature has ordained that the butterfly and the beetle play their brilliant little parts in her great show without a word. Were the animal world as loquacious as the human, who could support the universal hubbub? They had been climbing all the time, ever a musical splash of waves in their ears, ever interlaced

branches overhead, broad pattens of azure visible here and there, but the sea and the sky shut out for the nonce. Under their feet velvety moss, about them, many a grey old trunk tapestried with bright leaves and blossoms of creeping plants, the scarlet and the blue! By-and-by, they came to a break in the wooded foreland, and what a change! The earth had here been cleft asunder and from two dimpled hills, that parted gently, was seen the wide, open sea, still and far-off as in a picture, and of a pearliness lovelier than any colour.

But the little dell between the twin slopes—and 'twas one of many hereabouts—who shall describe the ineffable charm of those grassy stairs, the dark rivulet trickling down, the sunny warmth above, the cool green shadow below? In the light of

golden lawny spaces beyond the opening, glanced white-winged butterflies as the wide expanse of sea and sky was broken by silvery sea-birds or the flashing keel of a ship at anchor. Wild with delight, the girls now sprang from one tree to another, holding fast by stem or branch as they peered down.

‘Have no fear for us!’ cried Elizabeth, standing on the giddiest height. ‘We are both accustomed to precipices, and this is nothing in the way of hardihood to what we will show you to-morrow.’

She let Arthur hold her hand, however, as she slowly descended the steep sides of the tiny ravine. Flora also accepted Hervey’s help, and soon all four were safely landed at the bottom.

‘Will you really show us more wonderful places still to-morrow?’ asked Arthur.

‘It is the custom,’ replied Elizabeth, ‘that those who arrive on the island first should act the cicerone to newcomers. We will then next take you with other acquaintances to the Black Lake.’

‘An awful name!’

‘But a sweet place! We can go by steamer and walk home, making a halt on the way.’

‘And after the Black Lake?’

‘There is the lighthouse, like no other ever built. Nothing here is to be matched anywhere in the world.’

Arthur glanced at his beautiful companion and thought that the remark applied at least to one of the beings in it. She continued to enumerate the marvels to be seen, in the happiest humour. The sea, the forest, the glory of the day, and

the sense of freedom seemed to intoxicate her.

‘Then there are the fisher maidens of the Blue Bay,’ she went on, gaily. ‘They wear wonderful dresses of the fashion of a thousand years ago, and have the bluest eyes in Christendom.’

Arthur did not say it, but the thought was in his mind that eyes blue enough were at hand.

‘Ah !’ he broke in, laughingly, when she had come to an end of her list, ‘you do not read your guide-book. You are an untrustworthy cicerone ! You have left out one of the chief sights of the island.’

The four had been running hither and thither in search of butterflies, making posies with the zest of school-children, and had joined in a summer song. When

Arthur spoke, Elizabeth, kneeling on the ground, was letting Flora wreath her hat with flowers.

‘And what is that?’ asked the girl, without looking up.

‘You must know that a prince has his château and chace here.’

She made no answer, and Arthur went on, in the same careless, teasing voice,

‘An amiable and charming prince, too, if report speaks truly. Have you never heard of him?’

Elizabeth sprang from the ground, and Arthur saw that, for some reason or other, the question had ruffled, nay, disconcerted both sisters. Flora crimsoned and fanned herself, pretending to be suddenly overcome with the heat. Elizabeth, whilst outwardly self-composed, could not conceal her discomposure. She did not

change colour, but scorn and anger flashed from her eyes as she made curt reply,

‘I have no love of princes.’

Arthur smiled inwardly. In this fair girl had he found one of the would-be re-constructors of society on revolutionary principles as numerous among the one sex as the other? The daringness and independence of character shown by Elizabeth in bagatelles seemed to warrant the idea. It tickled his fancy to think that here he had a fascinating convert to win over to the cause of order and expediency.

‘I hope you do not include all in your category. You would not, for instance, think the worse of me for knowing this same prince?’

Perfect mistress of herself, Elizabeth still made no effort to conceal her scorn.

It took entire possession of her as she turned upon her companion quickly with another question.

‘How much do you know of him?’ she asked.

Arthur laughed lightly.

‘To tell you plainest truth, nothing at all as yet. I merely put the question to prove the depth of your democratic convictions,’ he said, feeling now that he was on the wrong track.

Elizabeth laughed also, the short, artificial laugh that seemed to hide a feeling of relief.

‘Indeed, you are wrong there. I am no democrat in the sense that the word is generally used. One may have well-founded dislikes without being a theorist.’

‘I am thankful that you are no theorist,’ Arthur said.

‘And I am thankful that you do not keep bad company.’

‘Oh!’ he cried, with a shocked look, ‘can there be bad company on this island?’ He would not now say a single word about the introductory letter, from one foreign prince to another, in his pocket.

‘So they say. But let us wait for the others to catch us up. We will then make a halt at the Forester’s, where we can have curds and whey.’

Meantime, Hervey and Flora had been absorbed in almost artless confabulation. The poor child seemed ready to cry of chagrin after that little episode, and quite unable to resist taking this new friend into her confidence.

‘Elizabeth feels things too strongly,’ she said, ‘she cannot help speaking out before strangers.’ Then, correcting herself, she

added, apologetically, 'Of course, coming from Professor Brandt, we do not consider you a stranger. But think no more of what she said just now.'

'Your sister has evidently a poor opinion of princes in general, and of this one in particular,' Hervey made indifferent answer.

How many other generous-minded girls were ready, like Elizabeth, to castigate those who fell below their own lofty standards of morality, especially of the other sex, he thought! The little outburst of feeling seemed to him to mean no more than this. The prince in question was a worldling, a votary of pleasure; in fact, he had obtained an unenviable reputation. He should tell Flora nothing about the introduction in Arthur's pocket for the present.

'There are some things Elizabeth will

never forget or forgive; she says we are not bound to pardon injustice. But of what use to eat out one's heart without being able to obtain redress for wrongs ?'

'Ah !' thought Hervey. There is a question of family pride or interest here. This high personage has affronted or injure done of Flora's kindred, and refuses to make redress.

Then he ran over in his mind the various probabilities that might meet the case. Yes, there had been high play at cards, a brother, uncle, or cousin of the lovely, haughty Elizabeth, and her sweet apologist had been ruined by enforced payment of a debt of honour.

'Some families are born to misfortune,' resumed Flora, as if such a summing-up afforded comfort. 'We must bear what trials Heaven sees fit to send. Only, of

course, I cannot moralize to Elizabeth as she is my elder sister.'

'I do not think moralizing does anybody any good. Arthur preaches to me perpetually, and I am not one whit the wiser.'

Thereupon both laughed gaily.

'Strange,' began Flora, 'that you should feel towards your brother as I do towards Elizabeth. We love each other dearly, yet she seems to forget that there are only five years between us, and that I am no longer a child.'

'If you have nothing more to complain of you are fortunate,' rejoined Hervey. 'Not a day passes but I tell Arthur he must think me an idiot. We are the best possible friends for all that.'

Thus the pair prattled on, whilst they continued their wonderful walk through

the beechen forest above the sea. At first the way had led them through coppice woods and tangled undergrowth, now close to the edge of the bluff, now through the heart of a tiny combe, opening upon the glassy bay.

Here might be seen those storm-beaten trees, such as were used by Trojan archers. Not a stem or branch but had been contorted by the wind into the strangest forms ; some of them might have been taken for kobolds or other woodland folk, their quaint forms and eye-like cavities having a curiously human look.

They had now reached higher open ground, where veteran trees of superb aspect had been allowed ample room in which to throw out their branches, each standing in smooth open spaces, magisterial and alone. Nothing more strikes the ima-

gination than these glorious relics of ages long past away, for not a tree was here but, if transported to a modern park, would have dwarfed its neighbours as an African lion its menagerie-bred brethren. There they stood, and there, if left undisturbed, they would stand for ages more, proud, generous, superb, whilst generations of pygmies passed under their shadow, uttering feeble praises.

‘There is the Forester’s. We can now rest,’ Flora cried. ‘And see, Elizabeth is nodding and waving her hand to friends on every side. It is the universal meeting-place.’

CHAPTER IV.

A QUESTION.

THE forester lived a little way off, and it was to a wooden hut or pavilion near that holiday-makers and wayfarers betook themselves for curds and whey and other homely regales. The wide world could not show a fairer halting-place. The sea that lay close behind was shut from view by the thickly-interlaced branches of beech and pine, whilst from the open, sunny plateau on which stood the hut, broadened out on either side a vast wilderness or natural

park, vista on vista of glade, grove, and alley, all now interpenetrated with the warm afternoon glow. On the smooth sward lay broad discs of gold, like yellowing leaves of water-lilies on an olive-green lake ; but further off, among the closely-serried forest-trees, sunshine played fantastically as the coruscations of lightning, inky cloud and fiery flash, not more strikingly contrasted than the dense shadows of the beeches thus fitfully lighted up. Beyond all, cloud upon cloud, billow upon billow, stretched the remoter reaches of the forest, no horizon marking the separation of world and sky in the dim purple haze. The score and odd idlers lounging in front of the pavilion were, however, not intent on exquisite lights and shadows just then for a minute or two. Elizabeth with charming grace had introduced the

two young Englishmen to this group of acquaintance and that, and the four were sipping milk and less pastoral drinks at a long table with a goodly fellowship.

‘How delightful are these garden taverns, this out-of-door inn-keeping!’ said Arthur, as he scanned the inscription over the door of the little hostelry opposite. ‘In England we have not the word because we do not possess the thing. Here the inn is only a place to sleep in, and the garden or forest is the keeping-room, the closet, the dining-hall. To escape from walls and artificial horizons, and live for a time the life of the bee, the bird, the butterfly—can anything be more enchanting?’

‘That reminds me,’ said Elizabeth, as she smilingly handed him the black bread and butter. ‘This day week there is to be a dance in the forest. The fishermen

every summer thus do honour to their guests, and rich and poor dance in company.'

'Shall we be invited?' asked Arthur.

'Everyone is invited,' answered Elizabeth. 'But here come more friends, and more, and more;' and she rose, Flora also, to greet the new-comers, most of them what may be called way-side acquaintances, friends made, as the fashion is in these parts, at the mid-day ordinary, on the steamboat, or in the forest resort. It is no hard matter to find friends among those of the same manner of thinking, and belonging to the same social grade as ourselves. These kindly professors and pastors, with their families, belonged to one pattern, and the same might be said of the merchants, military men, and sprinkling of titled personages here met together; what differences of

rank there might be, were kept in the background during the holiday season, just as school-boys fall out of rank on the play-ground.

On a sudden, however, there emerged from the depths of the forest the tall figure of a man, who could evidently be no chance-made acquaintance of the two girls; rather a kinsman, or at least an old friend, it seemed, from the affectionate way in which he greeted them. Sun-burnt, travel-stained, with his knapsack on his back, and a huge knob-stick in one hand, he yet had a fine appearance. The well-shaped head, the lofty brow, the frank, honest expression proclaimed the honest gentleman, in spite of his somewhat ragamuffin exterior.

‘At last we meet again!’ he said, throwing down knapsack and stick, and

glancing from one sister to another, as he stood, bareheaded, before them. ‘At last !’

‘After five years,’ Elizabeth answered. ‘Not so very long ago, we heard of you in the heart of Africa.’

‘Where, indeed, have I not been since we last saw each other. And my little friend Flora has grown up ! But’—here he looked about him inquiringly—‘there were three flowers when I went away. The eldest sister ? The beautiful Stella, where is she ?’

Flora crimsoned with a childish look of pain, whilst her rosy lips quivered, and tears fell from downcast eyes. Elizabeth looked up, rigid as a statue. The light that a moment before had been in her face died out. Speech did not come.

The man darted a glance at the gowns

of the two girls. They wore white, and white may also be the symbol of mourning. Then, looking unutterably aghast and woe-begone, he got out the words under his breath :

‘She is dead?’

The younger sister looked at the elder. Elizabeth was now constrained to speak.

‘We are but two!’

The look of misery in her face stopped all further questioning, nor could any private conversation be carried on in such a place, or at such a time. She added, with a great effort at collectedness,

‘Ask no more. We have come here to forget.’

‘Stella dead! Merciful heavens!’ ejaculated the man under his breath; then gradually recovering himself, and seeing

the humour in which Elizabeth was, he added, 'I wish I were going to stay on this island, since I find you here. But I never stay anywhere, as you know.'

'Why in such a hurry just now?' asked Elizabeth, who had by this time regained self-composure.

'I am bound further northward, and only landed here a few hours ago to get a glimpse of the place. Our steamer lies at anchor in the bay.'

Elizabeth now turned to introduce the stranger to her new friends, who had withdrawn a little. Mr. Venning and his brother would be glad, she felt sure, to shake hands with one of their oldest friends, and a naturalist not unknown to fame, attached, moreover, to a scientific expedition that must have been heard of in England. Carl Fleming in his turn must

be pleased to find in these tourists former pupils of the well-known Professor Brandt of Göttingen. So she said pleasant things all round, and the business of coffee-drinking went on more generally than before.

‘I am glad that we now know each other’s names,’ Flora said, simply to Hervey, who had contrived to remain by her side. ‘Is it not odd that they should be the same in your language as well as ours. We have Hervé and Arthur, and you also have Elizabeth and Flora.’

‘And Flower is as pretty in one tongue as another; though your surname calls you flower twice over,’ Hervey laughingly rejoined.

‘Yes,’ Flora answered, merrily, ‘I have my two names in one; but my sister’s Elizabeth Blume—Elizabeth Flower, that sounds better in English, I think.’

The company soon broke up into little knots, some to penetrate further into the recesses of the forest, others to explore the cliff, a few, Arthur and the new-comer among them, lazily stretched their limbs on the mossy carpet. Here and there might be seen the straw hat and blue veil of some fair sketcher, whilst in the open space before the little châlet, a dozen children joined hands in a merry round.

‘I cannot tell you how shocked I was just now to learn that those beautiful girls had lost their eldest sister,’ said the naturalist, as he offered Arthur a cigar, ‘I have known them from childhood, though my wandering life keeps us apart. The rose is left,’ here he glanced at the elder sister, ‘and the sweet shy bird,’ here he

looked towards Flora. ‘But where now is she who was the star?’

Arthur listened almost carelessly. Truth to tell, he was watching the exquisite picture that the pair of sisters made as they moved gracefully to and fro beside the swing. Swinging was a favourite pastime here, and they were giving delightful turns to two youngsters left out of the round.

‘Do you know how it happened?’ added the other.

Arthur explained that his acquaintance with the whole company dated from that morning.

‘And I see no one else I can question. But why do I want to learn more?’

“The beautiful also must die.”’

Then, as if forgetting that he was not

alone, he repeated the wonderful little poem he had begun. At any other time Arthur would have heard Schiller's verses delightedly, but he was in no mood for a threnody just then. This breezy forest world which was yet the world of the sea ; this unwonted freshness and freedom he was breathing as purer, less trammeled air, this little life he was living, twice islanded from the world of every day, all filled him with the wild joy of living, rather than deep musings about death and fate.

‘Sorry enough am I to quit such a place and such company,’ said Carl Fleming, rising as soon as he had finished his cigar. ‘Who knows ? We may all meet here on my return.’

‘I for one am in no hurry to go.’

‘Happy Englishman ! enviable human

being,' rejoined the other. 'But summer is of the shortest on this little land. In six weeks from to-day, if you are wise, you will pack your portmanteau and be off and away, otherwise you may be frozen in for the winter.'

Time as well as Death may be a mere word in certain ears, and at certain seasons. Arthur smiled, and his looks said what was in his thoughts. Six weeks seemed as far off to him just then as six years. Then his companion made brief adieux to the two girls, and hastened away. The rest of the company also began to disperse in groups of twos and threes.

CHAPTER V.

THE WALK HOME.

SOMEHOW or other, none knew how it was, the little company returned in the order it had come, Arthur still keeping his place by Elizabeth's side, Hervey in close attendance upon Flora.

The girls had undertaken to show them a different way home, and what a way it was ! Enchantment could go on no further.

They had suddenly quitted the upper forest world still bathed in mellow light,

and after a sharp descent of wooded pathway found themselves in the twilight below, the waves of the tideless sea rippling gently on one side, whilst on the other rose chalk banks gleaming silvery white against the pure heavens, and fringed with rare flowers, hanging gardens by the sea !

High above, ripe sunshine lingered about the coppice woods, but around them all was grey, pearly, silvery, only one blotch of deep orange breaking the wide expanse. Just opposite lay a fishing brig at anchor, two ships instead of one, the twin imaged in the water more beautiful than the one standing solidly out against the sky, and as they walked along they saw colours no less bright close under their eyes, ruby-red and orange tangle, gleaming pebbles, patches of emerald green sand, and how

many other lovely things lying in the transparent waters.

Arthur's attention, however, was at once arrested by a flower in full bloom on the chalk bank. Starry bright it was and exquisite in form, each perfect glome shining out from the background of white cliff and glossy round green leaves. There seemed a spirit in every one of these blossoms, and, as you looked at them, it seemed impossible to believe that some pensive sympathy with human things might not be here, some wistful communing with mortal joy and sorrow. Flawless each tiny ivory cup as a gem, like one to another as pearls on a string, yet a narrow observer could hardly help finding a certain individuality, an approach, if not to consciousness, to that sentient being so closely allied to it.

‘Will you get me some of my favourite flowers,’ asked Elizabeth, for they were all growing out of easy reach.

‘I am so little skilled in flower-lore, that I do not so much as know its name,’ Arthur replied.

‘The name tells you nothing, and this lovely flower has no legend that I know of. It is the only one I have ever had a real passion for; it was my sister’s favourite flower—I love it for her sake.’

Arthur understood the look of dreamy sadness that now filled his companion’s eyes. It was not Flora she was thinking of, the careless, sportive, living Flora, but that other sister he would never know, Stella, the beautiful, the dead.

Meantime he was scaling the steep chalk banks, gathering a tuft of creamy buds, glossy leaves here, a tall peduncle there,

Elizabeth watching him with pensive approval.

The sight of this natural flower-bed, sprinkling of earth's stars before their brighter compeers shone forth, seemed to sadden her inexpressibly. She evidently forgot that this willing knight was a mere acquaintance of yesterday.

‘Do not be ruthless. Leave plenty for others,’ she said, beckoning him to come down, and awaiting the spoils with almost passionate impatience. Then, when he was by her side, holding up both hands full of the pure white globes delicately pencilled with faintest violet, and shedding faint fragrance, she bent down and ecstatically, tearfully kissed them where they lay.

What wonder that the polished London-bred man of the world had not a syllable

at command? At last he did get out, in a low, subdued voice,

‘You loved her very dearly, then, this sister?’

Elizabeth, with tears still glistening on her eyelids, now motioned him to sit down, so that she might the more conveniently bestow the lovely things in her basket. As she did so, he watching her, she said, by way of answering his question,

‘Do we not all love best that which is most beautiful? And these flowers, that I have never yet found growing anywhere else, will always be very dear to me, very dear and very sad, because they will always remind me of a joy that is gone.’

‘We must all look forward to the joy to come,’ put in Arthur, not in the least knowing what he meant, only knowing

that the speech sounded appropriate under the circumstances.

‘There might be joy for me,’ began the girl, earnestly, then breaking off suddenly, as if she felt that she was too forwardly confiding to a stranger. ‘Some day, perhaps,’ she added, ‘I may tell you what I mean, that is to say, if we get to know each other better, and I can look upon you in the light of a friend.’

‘Might I but be your friend?’ cried Arthur.

His manner was honest and hearty, without a touch of sentiment, and without a touch of sentiment Elizabeth made answer,

‘Friendships are not made in a day.’

She went on speaking whilst she stealthily caressed her flowers, pressing one dainty floweret to her lips, another to her

heart, breathing their delicate fragrance, fondling them as if they were living things.

‘You may in time become my friend, and prove very serviceable to me.’

She stopped short, smiling gravely as she perused his questioning face.

‘How can I tell if the friendship I have to offer is worth the services I must ask in return. Are you a brave man?’ she suddenly asked, still studying his physiognomy.

‘Try me,’ was Arthur’s tart reply.

Elizabeth saw the look of vexation that came into her companion’s face, and made quick apology.

‘Pray pardon me. I had no right to put such a question. I do not know how it is, I forget we are strangers to each other,’ she said.

‘Let me also ask your forgiveness,’ Arthur replied, speaking with uncompromising sincerity. The strange, new situation in which he found himself seemed to demand it. ‘I did wrong to take affront just now. How can a man aver of himself that he is brave till his courage has been put to the proof? As yet mine lies dormant, alike physical and moral ordeals are yet to come. But,’ here the young man’s voice gained in fervour and Elizabeth realised that there might be a heroic side to this pleasant, polished man of the world, ‘let me tell you my theory about courage, no matter of what kind, for it is a subject on which I have cogitated deeply. A crisis there comes to every human being—so, at least, I believe—when his heroism is tested, when he must

go through the fire for once and for all.'

'That I believe also,' put in Elizabeth.

'We must store up our little stock of the heroic virtues against they are needed, for needed they surely will be, and that, perhaps, when we least expect it,' he went on. 'Thus it comes about that although, Heaven be praised, my existence up to the present time has been unusually smooth and comfortable, like that of a fireman off duty, I am always on the look-out for a summons.'

'Strange,' mused Elizabeth. 'Such thoughts have often crossed my own mind. Once in every lifetime human beings are brought face to face with the awful aspect of destiny. Some are sore afraid, and others show almost a god-like resolution.'

‘Oh, do not let us soar to such comparisons. Is it not enough to be a man?’ cried Arthur.

‘It should be, and just a man’s coolness, a man’s daring I need now. If I might only find in you the friend, the brother, the champion of my dreams.’

She broke off again, taken aback by her own out-spokenness and self-abandonment, and glanced at Flora, now daintily picking her way through the water, Hervey holding her hand as she stepped from stone to stone.

‘Flora and I are alone in the world, and you have no sisters. Perhaps that is why we are drawn with such friendliness one towards another,’ she said, in a half apologetic voice, although her companion looked in no need of apology; with the same irresistible manner she added, half

joyfully confiding, half bird-like shy, ' and none of us know how these things are. We often find friendship and sympathy when we most need them.'

Arthur was about to make appropriate answer, when she, quickly, and, as he thought, unkindly, changed the subject. She could not forget her flowers, and the recollections of mixed pain and delight they brought, whilst she was evidently anxious to discard personal talk.

'The thought in my own mind now must have struck you,' she said. 'Is it not strange that, whilst we cling passionately to certain aspects and certain ineffably lovely creations of Nature, they have nothing to do with us, and remain outside our poor little life of clouds and sunshine. The beautiful visible world is not made for us. Think of this island.

I have heard my parents say that, not so very many years ago, never a stranger was seen in the fairy spot where we now are. ' Yet the water, crystal clear, flowed then as now, showing the golden flowers of the sea ; these hanging gardens made the air fragrant, and there was the same glory of the woods above.'

' But is it not well for our peace of mind that it should be so ? ' asked Arthur. ' Were the natural world in perpetual sympathy with us, Nature a mirror of our joys and sorrows, who could support such dual existence ? The weight of two-fold memory, the real and the reflected, would crush us ! '

' You are right. Why must we be the slaves of one ? ' cried Elizabeth.

Then, with a sudden impulse, as if the sight of the flowers and the associations

they called up was becoming unbearable, she emptied her basket. One by one, she now took out each tall stem, with its twin leaves of deep green and blossom moony white, and laid them tenderly in a tiny hollow close by, memories in their grave!

‘If we ever become friends,’ she said, ‘I will tell you why the sight of these flowers is insupportable to me. Now let us join the others, and all hasten home.’

There was no hastening, however. Why should there be, when every moment the evening became more delicious? Elizabeth and her companion still kept close to the cliffs; now threading lovely little green ways cut in the forest, that here dipped to the water’s edge; now skirting the chalk banks, fragrant with nunilet and origame. Hervey and Flora, only

removed from them by an arm's breadth or two, remained on the shore. The girl, playfully eager, was searching for amber. It was often found here, she said; and kept the wearer from wizards and the evil eye.

‘You surely do not believe in such things?’ laughed Hervey.

‘Only when I am on this island,’ Flora answered, with perfect gravity. ‘It is an enchanted place, as you will discover, if you stay here long enough. You may throw aside your talisman when you reach the opposite coast.’

‘But if the sorcery is of an agreeable kind? Better submit to the spell,’ Hervey said, still mocking and ironic.

‘I could tell you a story that I think would make you believe in evil influences beyond mortal ken,’ Flora answered, in a

low, timid, yet eager voice. ‘Can it be otherwise explained how souls beautiful as those of angels become dark and evil? But I must not talk to you in this way; Elizabeth would be angry.’

‘Your sister has evidently taken kindly to my brother. She sees that we are not adventurers, anyhow,’ pleaded Hervey, in an aggrieved tone.

‘Elizabeth is older than I am. I must be guided by her in everything,’ Flora made reply, and could not be brought to talk of amber or angelic souls any more.

The four were now overtaken by friends and acquaintances, with whom they lingered on the strand till after sunset. A sunset it hardly seemed, rather a sunrising, so pure and bright the heavens, so intense the rosy glow gradually spreading over sea and heavens. The whole

visible world seemed turned into a globe of ruby, and, when the ruby faded, sapphire was there instead, waves and skies melted into one. It was still early when the brothers reached their hotel ; and Arthur, alone in his bed-chamber, took out his watch, smiling curiously as he wound it up.

Just twelve hours were flown since he last glanced at the familiar dial, and in the interval—he had fallen in love.

CHAPTER VI.

NO WHITHER.

LOVE as well as sorrow may be a thing to shun, and next morning Arthur Venning was hurrying with what speed he could command from the scene of yesterday's glamour. Capricious as lovers' mood seemed also the climate of this island, yesterday a fairy bower lapped by sunny seas, on the morrow a dreary place. Vague sounds of storm had disturbed Arthur during the night, and, when he drew aside his curtains, he saw the lime-

branches tossed against the blurred pane, and heard the waves breaking angrily against the shore. No pleasure-skiff could put out to sea in such a storm, but, were the day dawning goldenly, he must be off and away just the same. In the humour he now was, made up of feverish disturbance of sweetest kind, chains could hardly have bound him, fetters would have been forced somehow. The need of solitude and escape was imperative. He must separate himself from these new bewildering impressions to find out if they were anything deeper or more lasting.

So, no word said—no warning given, thus unceremoniously the brothers treated each other always—he was out of the house betimes, bound with all dispatch, no whither !

It is not very easy to escape either foes

or fascinations in an island without railroads, where roads are few, and, like the paths of the sea, not to be trusted in bad weather. A mackintosh and umbrella are all very well, but avail little when rain is tumbling down in jets and winds blow from the four corners of the globe. If there was only a railway, only a town, only some attainable dry place or other within reach ! ejaculated Arthur Venning. What should he do with himself in such a hurricane, such a deluge ? sighed the unfortunate lover, almost ready to anathematize the lucky stars he had blessed a few hours before.

Plodding on thus uncomfortably, with his sketch-book under his arm, he had reached the top of the village street, when a rumbling sound and an unwieldy vehicle, shaped like an old-fashioned ber-

line, came to divert his thoughts. And in a twinkling this tumble-down conveyance, which, as he saw by the somewhat pompous insignia, carried His Imperial Majesty's mails, occurred to him as a solution of the problem. Here was the post, ready to carry him, if not to a desirable place, certainly away from the spot in which he then was. Without a second thought, he stopped the post-boy, and took his seat, the inside of a dingy old stage-coach being better than the top, under certain circumstances, he said to himself, as he shut out the wind and the rain.

He found himself alone, but for one heavy passenger of his own sex, who was fast asleep in a corner. Arthur took possession of the other, and, comfortably disposing himself, began to wonder what

he should do next. The post would stop somewhere or other. Anything deserving the name of a town, the island did not possess, and a village hostelry, with a smoky parlour, and not so much as a newspaper to be had, offered few attractions. Well, mused Arthur Venning, as he also closed his eyes for a doze, anyhow, I have brought my sketch-book and moist colours, and I may find a rustic beauty to sit for me.

He nodded and nodded whilst the outlandish vehicle toiled up hill and down hill through the wind and the rain, till it was brought to a standstill with a jerk that rudely aroused both passengers.

‘What place is this?’ asked Arthur of his fellow-traveller.

‘No place at all,’ was the reply; ‘but

the horses are changed here. Are you going to the Ferry?' he asked.

'In the name of all the saints, no,' cried Arthur, aghast.

He had left the Ferry just two days ago! Was there only one road, then, in this island? Must he go back or forward, cross the narrow strip of sea dividing him from ships, railways, and civilization, or return, crest-fallen, whither he had come?

'Then,' politely replied the stranger, 'if you are not going to the Ferry, you are going to the Residency, of course; and there is the other coach waiting to take you.'

A bright thought now flashed across his mind. Yes, there was certainly one dry spot in this deluged land. Not a church, not an interior, not a museum

could this luckless island boast of in which a dilettante might profitably spend a wet morning, so he had heard. But the Schloss was also a covered place. It contained, so at least folks said, some pictures and works of art worth looking at, which travellers were permitted to see. In fine, it offered exactly the pastime he wanted, and, if the weather cleared up, he should have a pleasant journey home in the evening.

That little introductory missive safely stowed away in his pocket, Arthur of course determined to withhold. To present himself to a grand personage on a wet day was out of the question. An umbrella and aristocratic acquaintances are incompatible; but he might fairly present himself at the door as an English artist craving leave to see the owner's collec-

tions. Anyhow, on the arrival of the stage-coach at its destination, he would breakfast, or rather dine, the dinner in these parts taking place at midday, undergo a process of drying and brushing, and then proceed on foot to the palace.

The weather did not improve, but Arthur's spirits rose when this tumble-down old carriage at last stopped before a well-built inn, and a glance showed him that all the pleasant possibilities he had just now entertained would be realised. An hour later he was hastening across the park, sketch-book under his arm. If only the sky would clear, and the necessary permission be granted, he might make a charming study here, he thought. The views on all sides were said to be magnificent, the palace itself a gem of modern art; but under a leaden sky, and through

a mist of rain, these things could only be guessed at.

Arthur had received glowing accounts of the prince's graciousness to art-loving strangers, but was hardly prepared for the reception accorded him; for no sooner were the words, 'An English artist,' out of his mouth than, without waiting to hear more, the elderly woman who opened the door ushered him in, and, beckoning him to follow, led the way upstairs.

He noticed with a little surprise that it was a side staircase she now took, and not the nobly-proportioned flight of marble steps, royally carpeted, that evidently led to the state apartments. His conductress had motioned him to wear a pair of felt over-shoes lying on the threshold, so that it could be no precautionary measure on her part. He supposed he should see the

grand entrance afterwards, and followed without a word.

What was his astonishment when the woman, still chary of words, opening the door of a small but beautiful room, evidently a woman's room, handed him a chair and went away. His first impulse was to go after her and ask if she had made a mistake, explaining that he was there by no appointment. On second thoughts the matter seemed to have little mystery about it. He but waited for an informal permission to see the pictures ; that was all.

Five minutes passed, during which he surveyed the room, taking in every artistic feature with his quick, well-trained eye. The charming picture on the wall, the choice modern furniture, the veriest bagatelle being a work of art, the superla-

tively bound books, all testified to the elegant taste of their possessor.

What immediately riveted his attention, however, were two portraits of a beautiful and sumptuous woman that lay unframed, as it seemed hardly finished, on two easels. Each picture was evidently the work of a different hand, and never surely could portrait painter have had a harder yet more delicious task ! Arthur was standing before the canvases spell bound, when, without any warning, the door opened and a lady came in. He saw at a glance that she was the sitter. But how much more beautiful ! She was dressed in black, and, as she moved towards him, he fell back hushed and awe struck by the pathos in her face.

This glorious creature might have sat to-day for a *Mater Dolorosa*, yet the simple

sable garment she now wore became her no less than the queenly gems and dazzling textures with which she was bedight in both pictures. Perhaps even better. There was more here of the star than the queen, the quiet, subdued, yet overmastering loveliness, that needs no mundane lendings, that enforces consenting homage because it is itself.

‘ You are the English portrait painter,’ she said, removing the two pictures from the easel, and seating herself opposite to it. ‘ Pray begin the sitting at once.’

Arthur now realized his dilemma. He was evidently mistaken for the third artist invited to enter the lists. A German, possibly a French hand had failed to carry off the palm. Some countryman of his own was to compete in his turn. There

was not a minute for deliberation, and he unhesitatingly accepted the challenge. After all, he said to himself, explanation could not be very difficult. A painter, not unskilled in portraiture, he had been accidentally asked to take this lady's portrait. What should he do but accept, leaving any mystery to be cleared up afterwards. Such a misinterpretation of the true state of affairs under the circumstances could but meet with indulgence. And who knows? He might now succeed, as he had often done before, in achieving, no *chef-d'œuvre* certainly, but a striking likeness? That was most likely the one thing needed, and was within his capabilities. He set to work in a business-like fashion, and having prepared his colours, turned expectantly to the sitter.

‘Have you any instructions to give me?’ he asked, not in the least knowing how to address her.

‘None whatever,’ was the almost indifferent reply. ‘Except that I wish to be taken in this plain black gown as I am.’

Arthur bowed, mutely acquiescent and leaning back in his chair took that long, long look, only permissible under precisely such circumstances. And, as he gazed and gazed, the same feeling of awe and perplexity came over him, dominating mere admiration. Who could this rare creature be, and what was the secret of the more than sorrow looking out of the clear eyes? Hardly the mistress of a proud house, he said, or even a member of it, otherwise would she stay there unattended and alone? He settled the question in his own mind by saying that she certainly belonged

to the prince's family, but was, perhaps, a humble kinswoman, one by whom trouble had come upon the rest. Not the burden of secret grief only seemed to weigh her down.

Something more also he read as he studied that calm, pensive face. From those beautiful eyes looked forth no shy girlish questioning of life and destiny, but a woman's collectedness and passive resignation. The mystery of existence had been solved for her. Of the future she had neither supreme joy nor sorrow to ask. No maiden, but a wife was here. Whose, it behoved him not to ask.

CHAPTER VII.

A CHARGE.

THE pose was settled and the task fairly entered upon, when a strange sensation came over Arthur, for a moment hindering the facile pencil just before used with so much aplomb. Again and again he looked at his beautiful sitter, and each glance but heightened the sudden conviction that had flashed across his mind. He must have seen this unforgetable face before. Those clear eyes, so lovely and so pathetic, did not now meet his own for

the first time. Yes, the matter was past doubt. At some period or other, and in a place indistinct enough, but certainly not dreamland, they had met before.

The revelation embarrassed him not a little; for any former acquaintance, however slight, must sooner or later force him to drop the mask, and he felt now some compunction at having assumed it. Yet, if he should succeed, his triumph would need no palinode.

Up to this time the lady had only opened her lips to assent to his choice of position and other technical arrangements. When he paused, she rose and inspected the sketch.

‘You have certainly caught the likeness,’ she said, speaking in the same indifferent tone, as if her beauty were no more a thing to glory in than the black

dress she wore. ‘And that is what these two miss,’ she added, glancing at the rejected canvases.

‘The simpler a portrait is, the better, to my thinking,’ Arthur replied. ‘What we want is not a picture, but a personality —unmistakable, stamped with character and originality as the living face itself.’

‘The life should be there,’ answered the lady. Then, changing the subject abruptly, she said, with affected carelessness, as if wishing to conceal her motive, ‘You come from England. Tell me one thing —can a woman earn her bread there without difficulty?’

‘Under certain circumstances, yes.’

‘What circumstances?’ The question was put eagerly.

‘A livelihood there depends, as I presume it does all over the world, on apti-

tude. A clever woman, I suppose, can earn much more than her bread anywhere.'

'What do you call cleverness?'

'Well,' Arthur said, with some diffidence, 'I call it the faculty of giving out. Many people have a respectable amount of knowledge, but general dulness of parts makes it useless to them.'

His interlocutor seemed to reflect.

'I am thinking,' she said, pensively, 'of common people and common cases. Are there more children than teachers in your country, more sick than there are nurses to look after them?'

'I fear not. But there is room for a few paragons even in that line. Can I help you with regard to any especial protégée?' he asked.

Instead of an answer came a question

put in the simplest, most natural way in the world.

‘What is your name?’ she asked, looking straight at him.

Concealment was no longer possible. Arthur started to his feet positively blushing with contrition and dismay.

‘Pray, pardon me,’ he began, regaining self-possession as quickly as he had lost it. ‘I came here to-day in the capacity of a mere tourist, not of a portrait-painter. But, when I saw that I was mistaken for the professional artist evidently expected, I rashly hazarded the part. And I can handle the brush, as you see.’

The ingenuous speech and honest smile accompanying it seemed in some degree to disarm the lady’s displeasure. Still there was excessive *hauteur* in her man-

ner, and reproach in her astounded look.

‘You are an utter stranger here?’ she asked.

‘Exactly so; a mere holiday excursionist, come to this island for a few weeks’ pleasure. It is true I bear a letter introducing me to the prince, but I had no intention of presenting it to-day. Allow me to see him, to explain.’

‘The prince is absent,’ she said, coldly.

Then, after a pause, during which she seemed to ponder on what was best to be done, she looked at him as if to read him through and through, and made slow reply.

‘You are an Englishman; and they say an Englishman’s word is worth something. Give me yours that not a syllable shall ever pass your lips concerning this interview.’

‘Certainly,’ Arthur said.

‘They say that your countrymen are curt; but why may not one word suffice? I will trust you.’

‘I hope so,’ was the retort, again direct to bluntness; then, with a sudden glow of eagerness, he asked, ‘Will you not permit me to finish the sketch?’

Once more she reflected. Yes and No were written by turns in that pale, proud face. She seemed to wish for the picture, but was evidently anxious to be rid of his company.

‘I think it will be better to leave off now,’ she said at last, with some show of reluctance. ‘I will, however, keep the drawing, and you shall finish it at some future time, if circumstances permit.’

Arthur looked delighted, and at once proffered a visiting card. It was, how-

ever, merely glanced at, and returned to him.

‘English travellers are not so frequent here that there would be any difficulty in finding you,’ she said, smiling faintly. ‘But one word more before you go.’

She looked on the ground, paused irresolute; then, with strange hesitancy, got out the words,

‘This person—this protégée—of whom I spoke just now, has no friends in England. Are the friendless flouted there as elsewhere?’

Arthur once more had recourse to his card-case.

‘Surely not. But pray let me leave my English address,’ he urged, feeling at that moment as if he could canvas every educational and philanthropic body in London on behalf of this adorable

patroness. ‘On my return, you can write to me. I shall be proud to serve your friend. But,’ he added, with sudden light breaking on him, ‘I have a letter introducing me to the prince. We may meet here again.’

A second time the lady became rigid as a statue.

‘The prince is absent, and I am here for a few days only,’ she answered, with excessive coldness.

Arthur, chilled into silence, began putting his brushes together, without much alacrity, his incomparable sitter lingering, as if to get out one unwilling word more. At last she said, when he stood on the threshold ready to go,

‘I thank you, and I rely upon you. Remember that.’

The same woman-servant was there to

conduct him downstairs. He could only bow and hurry away, certainly in need of no more distraction yet awhile. The lovely vision of Elizabeth was for the nonce effaced from his mind as completely as the most desperate lover could desire. Instead of a girlish figure in white, ineffably blue eyes speaking mystery, soft brown hair fringing a candid brow and delicious glances of appeal, there floated before his inner vision an image lovely, passionless, pathetic as the doomed heroine of old Greek tragedy. No life in those clear eyes but the life that was gone; no story written on that pale, beautiful face but of wrongs past telling and supreme endurance under misfortune.

The more Arthur dwelt on this vision, the more it enthralled and perplexed him. Who might the rare lady be?

He had hardly quitted the precincts of the château, when the clouds parted, the sun gleamed forth, and the rain, no longer a steady volume of water, became a mere sprinkling of crystal dewdrops on golden leaves. To his great astonishment, he found that it was already three of the clock. Little time to spare, if he would return from whence he had come that day. As he paused, irresolute whether to go or stay, no wonder a smile rose to his lips. Could he choose but laugh half ironical, half self-depreciatory at the dilemma in which he now found himself? To go back was to fly towards certain peril, to stay was to run hazards perhaps more dangerous still. Fortunately, the island was too small to hold a third snare, soliloquised the young man, almost cynically.

He made up his mind to return; Her-

vey would expect him, and he had not so much as bought a pair of slippers. ‘We may lose our hearts, but nobody can afford to lose his knapsack,’ again moralised Arthur, trying to make merry at his own expense. So he did not attempt to get an idea of the place, but, hiring a carriage, or rather something that went by that name, drove straight back to the bower of roses above the bay.

The country through which he passed was very uncommon, but Arthur wilfully refused to see it. What could have induced him to come to this remote spot? he mused; much better to eschew romance, do the regular Swiss round, flirt with half-a-dozen conventional beauties, as he had often done, returning to his London life not a whit wiser or the worse. But these lovely, confidential Elizabeths, these beau-

tiful, mysterious goddesses in black, what would come of it all? No good, he felt sure, as he somewhat prosaically and ill-temperedly reviewed the events of the last forty-eight hours, summing up with the thought that it was hardly worth while coming so far in order to make a fool of himself. The thing might have been done as well so much nearer home.

The sky was now brilliant, and the charming landscape glowed like a bit of mosaic. As the unshapely cariole crawled along, Arthur, though persistently unappreciative and ill-humoured, could but take in an enchanting prospect here and there.

‘Am I in Italy?’ he asked himself, as he caught sight of a tiny inland sea of purest azure shut in by richest foliage, sapphire, and emerald dazzlingly bright,

or wound in and out little creeks crystal clear, in which alike cloudland and the bright world below were perfectly mirrored. Everywhere golden corn and field flowers, scarlet and blue, everywhere silence and solitude, save for companies of sea-ravens wheeling overhead.

The journey was made slowly, with many a halt by the way, and it was night-fall ere the traveller reached the top of the little rose-bordered street sloping towards the shore.

The place, however, was all astir, and Arthur found with astonishment gay Chinese lanterns hanging from every window, flags flying, bands of music on the march, and every soul on the alert.

CHAPTER VIII.

A COMPACT.

‘You shall tell me what you have been doing with yourself afterwards; let us go now and see the boats come in,’ cried Hervey, meeting him in the middle of the village. ‘You have lost the fishermen’s regatta, but you will see the little procession on the water. And from their garden,’ he added, exuberantly.

He put his arm within the other’s, and led the reluctant Arthur into the most romantic little garden in the world, in

honour of the occasion also lighted up with globes of ruby red and deep orange. It was one of those hanging gardens by the sea of which there are many here; below it the lime-trees and rose-beds, grassy banks running sheer into the water. A light palisade divided plot and steep bank, whilst on each side of the house were bowers for the use of the guests. This bit of poetry, translated into plain prose, was a lodging-house, kept by a fisherman and his wife of such good repute that they never had an empty chamber during July and August. These worthy folks and their children were now enjoying this animated scene with the rest of the company, four or five families in all, who slept indoors, certainly, but made parlours of the little summer-houses allotted to them in the garden.

‘I am delighted that you have come back in time,’ said Elizabeth, advancing towards Arthur with charming gaiety. ‘Is it not a fairy sight?’ she added, pointing to the little flotilla of illuminated boats on the water, ‘and will it not furnish a bright recollection of our island?’

It is wonderful how a sense of festivity exhilarates the mind as yet unsurfeited by handsomer shows! A few coloured lights on the water, a band or two of rustic musicians, flags flying, and children dressed in white and crowned with garlands—how little was here, yet more than enough to put the company into a sportive mood. Elizabeth was no more radiant than the rest, one and all had entered heart and soul into the spirit of the occasion.

‘We live here,’ Elizabeth went on, when Arthur had greeted acquaintance of yes-

terday's making on both sides, 'and only go to the hotel to dine. But where have you been? What made you run away on this day of all others?'

'I am sure I cannot tell. I went because I could not stay where I was, I suppose.'

Elizabeth turned to him sharply.

'What makes you ever enigmatic?'

'May you not be my pattern? You were riddling all yesterday?'

She seemed ruffled.

'We cannot entrust the story of our lives to strangers,' she said.

'And feelings must ever be more charily dealt with than facts,' retorted Arthur.

'Oh,' cried Elizabeth, looking honestly aggrieved now. 'Nobody here could intentionally have hurt your feelings, I am sure!'

‘I am sure of it also. But it is useless to reason with a tired, hungry, and ill-tempered man.’

‘Will you be in a better temper to-morrow?’ asked Elizabeth, much as if she were feelingly sympathetic about a tooth-ache. His captious mood seemed to damp her high spirits and make her a little mistrustful.

‘What is to happen to-morrow?’ he asked.

‘We have all made up our minds to visit the lighthouse, providing the weather is fair. The excursion has to be made by sea.’

‘All? Why must it be all?’ retorted Arthur, glancing round, not with disdain, but certainly impatience. His looks said that, estimable as he found these worthy pastors and professors and their families,

he should infinitely prefer a fellowship of four.

‘Why indeed?’ laughed Elizabeth, gaily. ‘Because the little steamer is not safe unless well ballasted. We pack ourselves in as closely as we can to steady it.’

Arthur made a comic grimace.

‘A delectable place, this island of yours, if an hour or two’s sail is fraught with imminent peril to life and limb.’

‘Rare delights are worth rare hazards,’ answered Elizabeth, sententiously.

‘I will cheerfully embark with you in a ship that has no bottom at all on one condition.’

‘What may your condition be?’

‘I am dying to know why you want a brother.’

A shadow, but a shadow only, clouded Elizabeth’s gaysome mood.

‘We will make a bargain then. You shall tell me what you mean by coming here to wait for a mirage, and I will explain—’

‘The sorrow you fly from,’ Arthur put in.

‘Nay,’ said Elizabeth, gently and pensively. ‘I cannot promise so much.’

‘Make clear at least one of your mysteries. You hinted at a duel.’

‘You ask too much. We were strangers to each other two days ago.’

‘Who need dog’sear an almanack except the bill discounter? Friendships and peaches may ripen in a day, it depends upon the kind of day of course.’

‘But, if indeed Time counts for little in the making of our friends, the fitness of things must be taken into consideration,’ said Elizabeth, demurely. ‘We are alone

in the world, Flora and I. We must be very circumspect.'

'Well,' Arthur resumed, pleasantly. 'You shall be as circumspect as you please to-morrow. You shall flout your faithful henchmen and fence yourself round with dragonish duennas. But I really will go to the lighthouse and help to keep the ship steady.'

Just then a sudden blaze of fireworks diverted their attention, acquaintances came up, and the remainder of the evening was enjoyed in company. And not till near midnight the rose-garden was hushed, save for the ripple of the waves, whilst, till a later hour still, the sound of music and singing disturbed the village. Arthur could not sleep. He was in one of those moods when self-questioning was all the more tormenting, because it seemed

unnecessary. Why should he take any thought for a morrow which was pretty sure to be a pleasant echo of to-day? Why need he disquiet himself at having two beautiful images before his mind instead of one? The lovely Elizabeth might stay, 'a cherished visitant.' The sweet and stately vision without a name would probably never be anything more. He dared not entertain the hope of seeing that incomparable lady in the black dress again. Those deep, pathetic eyes, that seemed to read the secret of destiny, had without doubt questioned his own for the first and last time. He had lived through a brief, distracting experience that must stand apart from the ordinary occurrences of life.

But Elizabeth?

Could not his introspections stop short

here? How could harm come to him through this sweet girl? Why should he not, in all trustingness and security, allow himself to drift into love and marriage like others? Yet he reasoned—this young man, half-aesthetic, half-worldling, was not without a touch of romance in his disposition, and certainly not without a touch of expediency—the thing I have desired is not an unmixed good. Love and wedlock, however charming, are disturbing influences. A man engaged heart and soul in intellectual work, and possessing some share of ambition, is best alone. Alike the paragon of spirit and attractiveness who absorbs him and the wrong-headed beauty who is as a mill-stone round his neck, are hindrances to his mental expansion and highest intellectual aims. Measles in the nursery and chefs

d'œuvre in the atelier are incompatible. No, he would revel in all the deliciousness this island had to offer him, and turn his back upon it when the time came as one who has seen a mirage and nothing more !

‘An idea strikes me,’ he said to Hervey next morning, as they took their coffee in the hotel garden. ‘Why not stay at the lighthouse for a few days?’

Hervey looked blank.

‘We are very well here.’

‘But we ought to see something of the island.’

‘That will not take us very long,’ the younger brother replied, still lethargic.

‘I am afraid, if I leave you here alone, you will be making a fool of yourself about that pretty Flora.’

‘Well,’ Hervey retorted, bearishly, ‘I

suppose making a fool of oneself, as you call it, is no disgrace.'

'We know absolutely nothing of these girls, charming as they are; their social position, family history, and so forth,' Arthur said, affecting his gravest, worldliest manner.

'I do not mean to be a prig when I take to myself a wife; so expect no great things of me in that line,' Hervey answered, still ruffled and disrespectful.

'I tell you what it is. We had better take the next steamer and be off and away; I do not relish our position—I do not indeed.'

'You had better get ready to go to the lighthouse,' Hervey answered, swallowing the remainder of his coffee.

Then both brothers had a hearty laugh, and began to make their preparations, Ar-

thur adhering to his first intention. He should stay away a week at least.

‘I wish you joy of it,’ was all Hervey remarked.

CHAPTER IX.

SWEET TALKS OF TWO.

THERE was no harbour on this side of the island, so that passengers had to be embarked in small boats, putting off straight from the shore. As Arthur and his companions took their places in one of these, they saw the empty steamer lying at anchor sway to and fro like a buoy. Elizabeth had certainly not exaggerated the business of ballasting. No toy-boat could look less seaworthy than the frail craft in which some scores of pleasure-seekers were

so gaily about to adventure themselves. As, however, one by one the boats discharged their burden, the tiny steamer grew gradually steadier; and when at last it could hold no more, there seemed nothing left to desire, hardly a spice of danger to tickle the palate of the enterprising, although, if report spoke truly, these little cruises, whether made by steam or sail, could never be very safe. The currents were treacherous, squalls apt to rise without warning, and bad the best steamer placed at the disposal of tourists.

Smooth seas, clear heavens, and gay company seem to bring security, and soon not a soul on board paid further heed to the crazy structure cleaving the bright waves so unconcernedly. The day was flawless, yet without the dazzling splendour of lower zones. Warm, tender, suf-

fused with pearly light, a lovely sublunar sphere seemed this every-day world of July. In the transparent atmosphere all things stood out clear against the pale blue heavens, cliffs, shining white-cresting forests, sail of distant shallop, but with softly graduated lights and shadows and quiet, dove-like harmonies.

Arthur, sketch-book in hand, persistently avoided an animated group within ear-shot. He heard the voices of Flora and Hervey in merry persiflage, mingled with Elizabeth's graver tones. One or two friends had joined them, and from a certain retiringness in the elder sister's manner he gathered that she meant to be as good as her word, and to study circumspection for the future. Flora and Hervey she apparently regarded as a pair of children who only needed a frown now and then.

For an hour they coasted the cliffs, snowy walls partitioning two blue worlds ; then, as if about to turn their backs upon the island altogether, they steered straight out in the open sea for an hour or more. They had now reached their destination. On the other side of the fine foreland, come upon so suddenly, stood the famous lighthouse. The laziest must climb the dizzy escarpment as best he could, no shelter from the noonday sun on the narrow strip of shore, nothing on wheels to raise them to the airy heights from which one or two pygmies were looking down. Full-sized human beings they could hardly be.

None, however, shirked his duty ; and soon the almost perpendicular sides of the cliffs had been scaled by all. Sea sights and sea sounds now vanished.

They found themselves in a golden world of corn and flowers, not a tree anywhere. But who wanted shadow under these breezy heavens? every breath wafting coolness and fragrance; every step lifting into airier regions.

‘This is delightful,’ cried Arthur, in the best possible humour. ‘I shall be able to sketch. But I see no lighthouse.’

‘The wise traveller never looks out for anything,’ laughed Hervey.

‘But,’ Flora answered, in a matter-of-fact way, ‘the lighthouse we must see, because we dine there. And look! Yonder is the tall red tower, and the tables all ready laid in front.’

‘May we sit at your table?’ asked Arthur of Elizabeth, smiling rather mischievously.

‘It is always a scramble. We must just

take the first empty places we find,' was Elizabeth's unpromising reply; and true enough, though Arthur found an empty place at a merry table, it was not hers.

Hervey contrived to sit near the sisters.

'How charming is the homely fare eaten in such a place,' cried the enraptured Londoner. 'Black bread soaked in beer soup! They taste to me perfectly delicious.'

'Do they really?' Flora said, with an ingenuous sigh. 'For my part, I would so much rather eat fine wheaten bread every day and such potage as they gave us at the hotel in Berlin.'

Poor little thing, thought Hervey. The life I could offer her would indeed be soft and easy, compared with that to which she is evidently accustomed!

Elizabeth interposed with dignity, and in rather a satiric vein, Hervey thought.

‘I do not agree with Mr. Venning. The fare is detestable in our island ; but I daresay it will do him good.’

‘Do you take me for so gross a materialist, then ?’ asked Hervey, affecting a grievance.

‘Which of us is free from materialism ?’ answered Elizabeth, severely. ‘You confessed to me yesterday that to eat with steel forks cost you a pang.’

Hervey took the reproof meekly. At any price, he must ingratiate himself with the elder sister. Before Flora he needed no caution. Meantime, Arthur, as soon as dinner was over, set off, without a word, sketch-book in hand, determined to shut his mind to other temptations for the present. Having come so far, it would

be absurd to go home empty-handed ; and wonderful sketching was here, of a dream-like, unearthly kind. The vast sun-bright plateau, open to the four winds of heaven ; the flower-crowned buttresses ; the encircling sea, dim and remote, were not to be matched with any recollections brought from the old world or the new. Austerity of the north was here side by side with southern fulness of life and glow, dazzling brightness of flowers under pale northern constellations. The lighthouse itself, a fine, square, many-storied tower of deep red brick, stood in the midst of the corn-flowers and the poppies ; but who cared to climb to the top, when the very ground on which it stood seemed to belong to an upper sphere ?

Arthur dawdled deliciously, choosing this spot and that for to-morrow's labour.

His mind was quite made up now to stay behind, so that there could be no need of hurry, he reflected. Throughout all these artistic enthusiasms, he was wondering what Elizabeth could be about, and at last made up his mind to go and see.

From the headland, scores of fairy ways led down to the shore, and, in whichever direction he looked, he saw straw hats and fluttering veils. Some of the tourists were disporting themselves on the flowery plateau, others taking giddy paths that overlooked the sea further below ; a few had escaladed the lighthouse, and were surveying, surely half Europe ! from the top.

Arthur skirted the cliffs, distracted by the matchless scene, the broad, open sweeps bathed in golden light and enamelled with wild-flowers dazzlingly bright, the pale, phantom-like sea, the ineffable

solitude, and the silence that brooded over all. He had not gone far when he espied Elizabeth sitting alone on a grassy ledge of the cliff. A freshly-gathered posy lay beside her, but she was gazing intently on the sea, lost in reverie. So absorbed was her mood that not till he was within a few paces did she turn round, to greet him in no uncordial fashion, he thought.

‘May I sit here also?’ he asked, letting his knapsack slide to the ground.

‘There is no privilege here, not a boundary mark or a barrier in the whole island,’ Elizabeth replied, smiling. ‘Pray sit down.’

‘Here, if anywhere under the sun, then, people should speak their minds,’ Arthur began. ‘You and I have something to say to each other. We should not

stand upon ceremony as if in a drawing-room.'

'Yes, I have many things to say to you. If I dared——'

There the girl stopped, hardly a blush, just a deeper carnation, mantling her cheeks.

'And I have one thing to say to you—if I dared,' echoed Arthur, emboldened by her timidity.

'Why should any man be afraid?' asked Elizabeth, with that fine flash in her eyes he had seen before. 'You may behave as you please. The breath of slander cannot harm you. But what a little thing may suffice to cover a woman with shame!'

Arthur naturally interpreted her words to be a passing comment.

'Surely this is the very reverse of a

squeamish place,' he urged. 'If our tête-à-tête is ill-naturedly gossiped about, then the rest of our neighbours fare no better.'

True enough many a group of the little company scattered about the headland had broken up into twos, and with excellent reason. The paths in this love-making island nowhere admitted of three.

'I am not thinking of a tête-à-tête just now,' answered Elizabeth, 'although even that might be blamed in me. I was looking further when I spoke.' She turned towards him with the beautiful expression of candour and ingenuousness that rendered her face so charming, and added, 'How can I feel sure that you are what I take you to be?'

'And what is that?' asked Arthur, briskly. All along he had been willing one thing and wishing another. He long-

ed for the very confidences he felt ready to flee from.

‘A good man,’ was the childishly straightforward reply. ‘None other can be my friend.’

‘What is goodness?’ Arthur asked, impatiently—‘church-going? Then I am a sinner. Converting the heathen? Gracemercy! write me down a villain. Alms-giving in the public ways? ’Tis but a brand fit for the burning am I. But has not God given me a conscience as well as my more saintly neighbours? May not my creed be every whit as good as theirs—better, if I damn them not? You catechise me.’

‘Are you pitiful towards the weak?’ asked Elizabeth, with almost solemn inquisitorialness. ‘Could you slay the vile?’

Arthur smiled.

‘A man can hardly affirm so much of himself without blushing. Would you have me boast of being a paragon?’

Elizabeth mused.

‘My own countrymen have many virtues,’ she went on. ‘But I have always believed that there is more pitifulness in the English character, more gentleness, perhaps—dare I say it?—a higher sense of honour. Was it not in England that you invented the word gentleman?’

‘That I am,’ Arthur said, almost meekly. He was trembling inwardly before this sweet confessor, wondering what she would ask him next.

‘Then,’ said Elizabeth, with the same collectedness and directness of purpose, ‘if an English gentleman is all I take him to be, you will not despise a friendless girl

for confiding in him, and trusting in him. Listen,' she said. 'I must speak out. Something—I know not what—prompts me to appeal to you.'

CHAPTER X.

SELF-BETRAYAL.

A PERILOUS position, certes—not a living soul within earshot; a lazy, languid world of flowers and lapping waves all their own; Time, the monitor, napping, nothing under the sun seeming to matter but this sweet talk of two! Let moralists rail as they may, the world grows no wiser than it was. Men's brains are busy with schemes undreamed-of when pre-historic lovers went a-maying; we are mere babes and sucklings in science to our great-

grandchildren as yet unborn. 'Tis all the same. From the time our globe was set a-spinning till it shall be brought to a standstill, one empire sways humanity. A pair of lovely eyes will enslave the soul of man for ever. A pretty girl makes the poetry of the work-a-day world.

Elizabeth went on, soberly as before, 'You find us here surrounded by kindly people, but these are travelling acquaintance, as we say in our own language. Flora and I have few real friends left; that is why, whilst talking to you as a sister might to a brother, I trust to you never to take advantage of our forlorn position in the least little thing.'

Arthur winced. Was, then, love-making forbidden for once and for all?

'It is very hard upon us both, especially upon Flora,' she went on. 'I am older,

and do not expect so much from life ; but Flora is as yet a mere child. No wonder she looks upon happiness as her right.'

' And why may you not be happy too ? ' asked Arthur, with kindly solicitude.

' Happiness ! ' cried Elizabeth, proudly. ' Were men and women only born to run after contentment ? I can bear sorrow. But it is disgrace that crushes me and breaks my heart.'

Arthur dared not ask an explanation. He must wait till Elizabeth should dash away her burning tears, and, mastering herself by an effort, vouchsafe to enlighten him.

' You would not learn our story here,' she said at last. ' Most likely none know it, or, if some do, they would keep silent out of common charity. Flora and I

belong to a ruined house, and the curse that lies on it is a curse of shame.'

'But the innocent are no longer punished even in public opinion for the guilty,' Arthur said, consolingly. 'We must leave our kinsfolk to blush for their own misdeeds and hold up our heads high all the same.'

'There speaks out a man's daring! Women must feel things and take things differently. We cannot show a brazen front to the world when inwardly we are humbled to the dust.'

Arthur felt more and more hopelessly at a loss. Had the father or any kinsman of this beautiful girl played the part of coward or traitor in any of the late wars? Was the family escutcheon thereby blotted for ever? Or might not one of her blood and name have gone over to the ranks of

those secret guilds whose watchword is regicide, and dishonour come thus? Again, he had heard of many crashes in the world of commerce lately, brought about by unfair speculation and shameless abuse of public credulity. A third solution of the mystery might be looked for in such quarters. Or lastly, supposing that Elizabeth owned a kinswoman as lovely as herself, and that disgrace had come in the female line? A shameful marriage, a catastrophe worse still, all these things were within the limits of possibility.

Elizabeth's thoughts seemed to have gone on another track, for she now turned to him with a sudden change of manner and put a question.

‘Why did you smile the other day when I lamented that a woman could not fight a duel?’

‘Why? Because the fighting of duels has long fallen into ridicule with us. Our laws indeed no longer permit it.’

‘Yet dishonour is avenged that way, if your novelists depict manners faithfully.’

‘Oh! abide by some fiction-mongers, and you have an English constitution as fantastical as that of the moon, which, you know, a gay Greek was whisked up to once upon a time! But, I beg your pardon, I have no right to speak slightly of the duel, since it is still accepted in your country and in some others for which I entertain profound esteem.’

‘How then,’ Elizabeth went on, ‘are questions affecting family honour settled by you?’

‘It depends upon the kind of question,’ said Arthur. ‘The foul-mouthed is amen-

able to the law of libel. The coward—if we trouble ourselves to punish him at all—is let off with a horse-whipping. There is another word for you of English coinage.'

'Would a man who insulted a woman get that?' asked Elizabeth.

'Well,' Arthur replied, 'he might get much more. The law does for us what duelling does for you.'

Elizabeth looked down and on each pale cheek now burned a painful blush.

'I was thinking of offences not amenable to the law in any country,' she said, slowly and sadly. 'There are so many.'

Arthur looked expectant.

'I will give you an imaginary case,' she said, speaking deliberately, and as he saw with great effort, she had evidently nerved

herself up to say something painful to disclose.

‘Suppose that you had a sister you loved very dearly, and that a man should win her love—the very life of a woman!—under promise of marriage, then basely desert her. What punishment would such a villain receive at your hands?’ she asked, turning towards him with indignant eye and cheeks afire.

‘This offence is also punishable according to the letter of English law,’ was Arthur’s reply. ‘For the most part, however, a proud woman, and I hope my sister would be of the proudest, would allow no vengeance to be wasted upon that contemptible vacillator, a recalcitrant lover.’

This answer seemed far from satis-

factory to Elizabeth. She reflected for awhile.

‘I have not made my meaning clear, I see,’ she said. ‘The most solemn promise a human being can make. The word that is as a bond. The declaration given upon oath. Shall a man forswear these and yet get off scot-free?’

‘My honest opinion,’ answered Arthur, ‘is that the jilt, whether of your sex or mine, is too contemptible a culprit to be brought to the bar at all. Society should turn a cold shoulder upon such gentry and appear to ignore their very existence. That is at least my notion.’

Elizabeth looked at him with an expression that more than discommended. There was almost contemptuous pity in the blue eyes now welling up with tears, and passionate remonstrance in the clear

voice as she faltered out, 'You have no sister!'

Arthur felt himself in a position all the more embarrassing on account of its very deliciousness. He must try to console this faltering tearful girl by his side, yet how? And her last words sadly disturbed him, for it seemed as if there could be but one reading of the beautiful Elizabeth's story. It was her own heart that had been wrung, her own troth shamelessly played with, herself and no other who needed a champion to uphold her. She then knew what love was, and the sorrow she would fain flee from was the mirage he had come to seek. The conviction humiliated him, yet he reflected that it could hardly be otherwise. These exquisite Elizabeths never reach women's estate without wooers enough,

if of unworthy sort, more's the pity. In his enthusiasm he felt ready, civilian as he was, to measure swords with the most martial Prussian in the Empire, on behalf of his beautiful friend.

‘I have no sister,’ he began, astonished at his own hesitancy. ‘But may not a man be moved to chivalrous feeling by other claims? Take me into your confidence and I will do anything you ask me.’

‘Will you really?’ said Elizabeth, brightly, although one tear was still visible on her cheek. ‘Anything? anything in the world?’ she added, with a strange, almost wild animation.

‘You have my word for it,’ Arthur went on, growing in his turn strangely animated. ‘Only remember, rare services claim rare rewards. I leave you free to

exact. Expect no moderation from me when my turn comes.'

Elizabeth hardly seemed to heed the import of the words, but grew gayer and gayer, whilst deftly enough she led him to other subjects.

'I must think, I must take time before opening myself more to you,' she said. 'To-day it is enough for me to know that I can count upon one intrepid and generous-minded friend. Now in your turn tell me something. What could you mean by saying to me when we first met, that you came here to wait for a mirage?'

'Is not this the land of mirage?' asked Arthur, airily. 'Might not a painter be taken here at his word?'

'If he lived to the age of the patriarchs, yes,' Elizabeth replied, laughing. 'A mirage, it is true, may be seen to-morrow;

likelier still, not for a hundred years! They say that only old folks on this island have ever witnessed one at all.'

Arthur, for the life of him could hold his peace no longer. The wonder of the scene. The irresistibleness of the situation. The bewildering charm of Elizabeth's manner, as distinct from coquetry as her beauty from cheap prettiness. These things mastered him. He felt, perhaps, a touch of self-contempt, but mingled with it an exhilaration that knew no bounds.

'Is not everybody's life a waiting for the mirage?' he whispered. 'But I wait no longer. Three days ago, precisely at one of the clock, I fell in love.'

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE BRINK.

THAT disturbing confession had the very last effect a lover could desire. Elizabeth, without a word or look expressive of disapprobation, merely rose, saying, hurriedly and agitatedly, that it was time to join the others.

‘I have kept already away from Flora much too long,’ she said, drawing down her veil to hide a blush. ‘What was I thinking of, and you, too? We shall have to embark in half-an-hour.’

‘I intend to stay here,’ Arthur made answer, rather morosely, Elizabeth thought.

She looked the inquiry she preferred not to put into words.

‘Truth to tell,’ he went on, vindictively, ‘if I return I should want to be talking to you all day long. I had better stay for a while where I am.’

Again Elizabeth took refuge in silence. Arthur resenting it more and more. He saw Hervey and Flora with others approaching, and heard the harsh whistle of the steamer summoning the holiday-makers to embark. He certainly should remain behind for at least a week. But for all that Elizabeth ought to answer him.

‘Do express an opinion one way or another,’ he finally added, almost tartly. ‘Shall I go or stay?’

Flora was already near, hastening to-

wards them to boast of her sea-holly. She had a sheaf of it ; a wonderful sight as she now held it up in the pure, transparent light, a flower that belonged to the sea, a leaf that belonged to the sky !

Arthur looked at Elizabeth.

‘ We had better do our thinking apart,’ she said, in a low voice.

That was all. Then the conversation became a mere buzz. Everybody had an adventure to tell of. Some, at peril of life and limb, had found a sea-crow’s nest in the cliffs, others a piece of amber on the shore. Golden sea-poppies, rare agates, and fossils were the spoils of a few. Only Arthur was empty-handed.

‘ Mr. Venning is no naturalist ?’ asked one of the party.

‘ Mr. Venning stays at the lighthouse. He has plenty of time before him,’ Eliza-

beth answered, quickly. 'Will he have fine weather?'

'That no one can answer for on this island,' another made answer. 'Like a capricious beauty, one smile is here purchased by a dozen frowns. I apprehend a change soon.'

'Would you not do better to return?' asked Hervey; but Arthur persisted in his intention. A weather-bound week had no terrors for him, he said. He had one book and plenty of sketching materials.

'Solitude has ever charms for your country folks, I know,' laughed a third tourist. 'You English really relish a Robinson Crusoe existence, otherwise I would gladly offer you my company.'

Arthur pleasantly declined the proffered sociability, and felt positive satisfaction as he watched the rest of the company em-

bark, by little and little the crazy vessel being steadied by its living freight. There are no common nights in these regions. As the little steamer slowly and laboriously got under weigh, it glided straight into the fiery west, leaving Arthur alone in his mellow world, deep azure skies, warm air stirring the corn and the flowers, a little kingdom of pure deliciousness all his own.

Small as was this island, to be traversed lazily in a long summer day, the traveller yet gains here a marvellous sense of vastness and expansion. There is awfulness and sublimity in these natural parapets high as mountains that wall it round about, dreamy loveliness and mystery in the glimpses gained from all parts of its tiny capital miles away that crested a fair hill, above all, gloom and majesty

in its ancient beechen groves close to a fairy sea.

Arthur sat down on a flowery hillock watching the black speck on the water, with thoughts alike distractingly sweet and yet uneasy. The longer he speculated on the matter, the more he felt convinced that Elizabeth must be the heroine of her own story. Adorable as she was, there yet lived a man ignoble enough and blind enough to woo and then desert her. This beautiful girl had undoubtedly been jilted by some villain he could at that moment with alacrity have hurled from the precipice on which he sat. But her love for this craven-spirited wretch was long turned to bitterest scorn, of that he felt sure.

Like himself, she was free to love. Did she understand the meaning of his words?

Was he already something to her? Would this sweet place, islanded from the world of every day and all familiar things, be the scene of their betrothal?

Arthur was angry with himself for letting his thoughts wander to another figure in this romance of three days. The sad-eyed lady of the pictures. Who might she be, and what was her story? Well, he concluded, there was time enough for all questions to be settled, all problems to be solved. If so many things had happened in less than one week, how many more might happen in six! And, with that philosophical reflection, he returned to his homely quarters in the lighthouse.

A supper of black bread, salt fish, and thin beer may be swallowed even by a fastidious Londoner under certain circumstances without a wry face. Arthur ate

and drank contentedly, whilst he flirted with the lighthouse-keeper's pretty daughter, then took a last turn abroad before going to rest.

There was no moon, but an effulgence more subdued, a light softer and more transparent. Every object was clearly defined in this wondrous atmosphere that was neither wholly day nor night, fairer than both, whilst over all brooded ineffable calm and stillness. Only the sound of the waves, as they plashed against the shore, broke the pervading silence.

‘I wish I were a genius !’ sighed Arthur, as he loitered back; to write down his impressions certainly, but in a critical rather than a poetical vein. He could tell others what he saw. He could not make them feel what he felt. The dif-

ference, as I take it, between talent and genius.

He stayed on, well pleased with his quarters; indeed, had it been otherwise, there was no possibility of getting away. The sky was fair, but winds were contrary, and neither sail nor steamer could make for the lighthouse till they changed. The sea—a smooth, silken floor no longer—had changed from silvery-grey to dark aqua-marine, and broken up into short, angry waves, with white crests, dashed ominously against the shore. There was a rough road that led homewards across the corn-fields, it is true; but alike, horses and carioles were now busy with gathering in the corn, and this round-about way would have taken a whole day. Arthur preferred to wait for a steamer, enjoying himself quietly meanwhile. This

grim tower, set as a watch over treacherous seas, soon seemed a home. He even grew accustomed to the coarse fare, which certainly was made more palatable by the pretty maiden who served it. The homely saws and primitive ways of the fisher-folk amused him, whilst alike on the breezy headland or on the narrow strip of shore below he got sketching in plenty. Then there were the flowers, and even a Londoner may care for these when making holiday on an island. He thought if he stayed there six months, instead of so many weeks, he should become not only an admirer of the picturesque, but a real lover of Nature, which is quite another thing.

At the end of the fourth day, this delicious dawdling was rudely interrupted. The wind had changed suddenly. The

sea showed a glassy surface. The lighthouse folk were astir, catering for expected guests; and there, sure enough, was the little steamer making for the lea.

For all that, Arthur was minded to stay, and would have stayed, had not the captain put in his hand a tiny missive from Hervey. It was a pencilled scrawl, evidently worded in desperate haste.

‘You must come back in the steamer,’ ran Hervey’s missive. ‘An invitation from the prince, this moment arrived. For to-morrow, mind.’

Arthur did not know whether to be pleased or vexed. He liked this toying with love and destiny. To be on the brink of making love, near this sweet Elizabeth, yet so far off; within a hair’s

breadth of fate, but not yet caught in her toils.

He must accept against his will. A man of the world could not slight an invitation brought about by a letter introductory. To do so would look almost like an insult to the writer of it, a common friend of the prince and himself. Arthur was too well versed in the ways of society not nicely to appraise the value of good company. It is ever expedient to visit at great men's houses. We are all bound to accept the standards of the world. Expediency is cousin-german to the virtues. Thus he moralised, though only one thought lent interest to the projected visit.

Would that vision flash before him once more? The unforgettable face, the black-robed figure, the deep, pathetic eyes. So

intense was this memory that he almost trembled with eagerness as he contemplated the possibility of a meeting. All the brightness and beauty associated with Elizabeth's name were pure human. The lady of the picture seemed to belong to a world as yet unknown to him, intense, passionate, unattainable by speculation.

With mixed feelings of regret and looking forward, he took a last stroll on that fragrant, flowery platform, half-way, as it seemed, between the stars and the sea. Around him all was gold and blue, the yellow of the wheat, the dazzling blue of the corn-flowers ; and vaster even than his airy abiding-place stretched the warm heavens above and the warmer sea below—dove-like hues and dove-like quiet everywhere.

‘I shall never come here again,’ mused

Arthur, as he descended the steep sides of the cliff, and once more entrusted himself to the tender mercies of the crazy steamer. ‘Why should I wish to see it again?’ he added. ‘Is it not mine as long as I live?’

He made up his mind to say nothing of the coming visit to Elizabeth. Hervey would hardly have alluded to the subject, since even to mention an invitation from a prince is to boast of it, and, as every personal topic becomes matter for gossip in small watering-places, he determined to keep their movements dark.

Perhaps from some democratic notions picked up at school, Elizabeth had already expressed herself unfavourably concerning princes in general and one in particular. Much better she should not be enlightened as to his acquaintance in this line.

CHAPTER XII.

F O R E S H A D O W I N G.

THERE are some places, however, in which it is impossible to keep anything secret, and this little fishing-village was one. Long before the moment for departure came, it became noised abroad that these two Englishmen had received the honour of an invitation to the palace. How can a community be expected to keep silence on a matter redounding to its credit? From one end of the hamlet to the other people were proud that the mark of dis-

tinction had been vouchsafed to their especial visitors. The thing would be talked of for years to come. A princely invitation, and to whom? To a pair of unassuming young Englishmen, civilians, untitled, undecorated, nonentities in popular estimation till this startling piece of information had come to take everybody's breath away.

The deportment of the brothers astounded observers no less. They absolutely never once alluded to the subject. But for the loquaciousness of their driver, not a soul would have known of their destination as next day they quietly drove through the village street, all the world a-gape, acquaintances bowing and smiling at the window, and young and old, gentle and simple, on the alert.

Only Elizabeth and Flora held aloof.

They had been placed opposite the pair, as usual, at dinner, but both girls seemed a little shy and spiritless, Arthur thought. He forebore to question Hervey afterwards, and Hervey made no overtures. The subject of their charming friends was banished as if by tacit understanding.

‘We went here, we did that,’ Hervey said, when describing the way in which the last few days had been spent. He never so much as once mentioned Flora’s name. Then there were many items of English news to discuss. A heap of newspapers and letters were opened and glanced at on the way. Both found plenty to talk about without venturing on dangerous ground.

All this time they were going over the same road Arthur had made so sullenly a few days back. To-day the weather was

dazzlingly bright and his own mood unusually animated and sparkling. What Hervey mistook for mere high spirits, indeed, was downright excitement and restlessness. He felt in a double, nay, threefold sense the bewilderment of an adventurous traveller, bound he knows not whither, on the verge of discoveries and emotions he cannot so much as coldly prefigure. The scenery, too, moved him not a little, and, although he had made the same journey before, he was now seeing it for the first time.

‘On my word, this is the most wonderful little country in the world,’ he cried, when they were about half-way to their destination. ‘Look at yonder town, with its grand old church perched on the hill. I have seen an eastern city just as gemmy, aerial, and transparent, amethystine pyra-

mid surmounted by a crystal dome, and all around mother of pearl and molten gold. But the cloud picture will not melt, and, when we are on the other side of the hill, we shall find colours as brilliant and solid as in North Italy, lapis-lazuli sea, hanging woods of malachite, and little close-shut landscapes, each a veritable mosaic.'

'We shall go straight back to-morrow, of course,' Hervey said, yawning. He was evidently in no mood for scenery, however bewitching.

'Really,' Arthur rejoined, 'you seem to forget that time is going fast. We are bound to see something of the island before leaving it.'

Hervey did not look as if the island particularly interested him.

'And, if the prince insists on keeping

us another day, we are bound to stay,' the elder brother went on. 'I wonder if I have time to make a sketch.'

Here followed a discussion with the driver, and the result was that Arthur descended to make his sketch, whilst Hervey went on in the cariole. The horses must rest for two hours on the top of the hill, said their conductor, so Hervey offered to go on and order the dinner, whilst Arthur would follow on foot half-an-hour later. The two just perceptibly jarred each other. Arthur was irritated at Hervey's indifference to this strange, sweet landscape. Hervey wondered how his brother could be more enthusiastic about places than human beings. The island was certainly delicious and romantic, but it lacked charm when Flora was not by.

Whilst the younger man's state of mind

was perfectly clear to the elder, Arthur, on the contrary, was a complete puzzle to Hervey. How indeed can one man understand another and a subtler? We perpetually fall into the error of measuring others by our own standard, just as we are apt to appraise the material world according to the limited capacity of self-consciousness. What is deeper than ourselves we shall hardly attain to, whether it be individual character or that wonderful environment of humanity we loosely call creation.

It was plain enough that Hervey loved the artless Flora, and intended to marry her; but, if Arthur loved Elizabeth, why this restlessness, this unevenness of temper, this quarrelling with a captivating state of things?

But, although Arthur's conduct troubled

him, the easy-going Hervey could not break through the habits of a lifetime. The elder might say what he would, the younger could only say what befitted. Each was sure to go his own way. Only one would ever play the part of critic. There were intellectual differences no less striking. Hervey saw things quickly and seized their meaning readily, but they hardly enriched, much less metamorphosed him. Every impression told upon Arthur's inner life.

This picture, for instance, he was looking on now, he would remember as long as he lived. Many a prospect he had seen in his travels far more superb and entralling, none that affected him so strangely.

Was he really beholding shadows or substantial things, cloudland or solid hill

and structure of men's hands? Could the fabled mirage he had come in quest of be fairer to the eye, touch the spirit with finer emotion? And, as he gazed and gazed, he threw down his paint-brush in a rapture of despair. Impossible to reproduce these silvery lights, this matchless iridescence. He had delicate hues enough on his palette, but the colours of that fair city, the hill on which it stood and the sky roundabout, he could not find. No city indeed. The island possessed none. Tiniest townling this, a mere fairy place, yet, by virtue of its ancient church and position, it wore from afar almost the aspect of a citadel. Arthur, however, put away his sketching things and attempted no more. And, as often happens, when he had walked a mile and came a-near, there was nothing wonderful to see at all, only a

church of the olden time perched on a high hill and a straggling village street of cheerful white-washed houses, each with its flower-garden after the fashion of those parts.

There too was the unromantic Hervey, quite delighted at the prospect of dinner, delighted also that the day was half over, that the morrow and Flora would soon come !

‘We shall most likely be bored to death at the palace,’ he began.

‘Now, Hervey,’ the elder brother admonished, tartly. ‘Bored or not, we must make ourselves agreeable. But why in the name of common-sense should we be bored?’

‘If asked to stay over to-morrow, I shall say I have an engagement. Which will

be the truth,' Hervey retorted. 'I am going to escort Elizabeth and Flora to the Black Lake.'

'I shall stay if I am pressed, and so of course must you,' was the curt reply.

Hervey took the answer as it was meant, and then they chatted of other things. An hour later they were off again, and, whilst Hervey dozed conveniently, Arthur had time to think quietly over his position.

He must hold himself on his guard, for he might need all his tact, nonchalance, and self-possession. His former visit and its untoward adventure might accidentally reach the ears of his host and require explanation. Or his beautiful sitter, what if she should carelessly let fall a compromising word? For his mind was made up

beforehand. He should now see her again and learn the reason of her strange reserve and sadness. They should come to know each other, at least so he felt sure because he willed it. Then he thought of his sweet friend Elizabeth. Ah, little of mystery or adventure here! Only an honest falling in love. For in love he was, Hervey no deeper, but he felt that time sufficed for love and Elizabeth. His life should belong to her. Two days he must first have to himself, two days for a little life of feeling and emotion with which she had nothing to do.

‘The prince?’ Hervey asked, suddenly waking from his drowse, ‘Is he old or young, married or single?’

‘I have not the least notion,’ Arthur

made answer. 'But we shall soon find out. We are already within the precincts of the park.'

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WORLD.

BUT a veil was lifted from the scene Arthur had gazed on coldly a few days before. It was as some glowing Alpine landscape from which the morning mists have cleared.

Instead of clinging vapour and watery clouds, pierced here and there by wan, melancholy green, a revelation of the warm, voluptuous South now flashed on his eyes. Could this airy structure, with its colonnade of purest marble breaking

the azure sky, lie in the very lair of the north wind? These terraced gardens and their lovely lake on which the swan 'sailed double, swan and shadow;' these rich, red roses, each a floral paragon; these orange-groves, showing golden fruits and waxen bloom amid the same green leaves; the snow-white statues gleaming from bright foliage—all spoke of Italy. Immediately around the palace were parterres and smooth, lawny pleasaunces, but far and wide stretched the park—alley upon alley, bosquet upon bosquet, offering dappled light and shadow, with occasional glimpses of the pale, crystalline, inland sea. To add to the magic of the place, the air from end to end was fragrant with the sweet smell of the lime-trees, just now in full flower. It was captivating, it was unsurpassed.

If the outside of the palace was a surprise to the travellers, what were their feelings when the wide portal admitted them within? Exact taste, boundless outlay could accomplish no more. Arthur's experienced eye saw at a glance that his host was not only an expensive man, but a skilled art-collector.

On every side were evidences of connoisseurship and discrimination; here an exquisite statuette from some modern atelier, there a fascinating chef-d'œuvre from the hand of the great Cellini. Every object, indeed, was a work of art, from the gold inkstand of mediæval workmanship on the writing-table, to the hand-bellows, adorned with the prince's monogram in pearls and turquoise. All ages and all countries had been laid under tribute for

this palace of Art within sound of Arctic seas. There were canvases of Tintoret and the superb Spaniard ; panels of Cordovan leather, old as the Crusades ; Gobelin tapestries ; faïence of Moustier and Nevers, when Nevers paid homage to a prince of Urbino ; cabinets of the famous Buhl himself. What was there not ? And all in fastidious keeping. No profusion, nothing out of place ; not a bagatelle that represented mere wealth.

These impressions were of the moment only, for the inspection of the palace and its art-collections could not, of course, be thought of then. The brothers were conducted straight to their chambers, and informed that the prince would receive them in the octagon drawing-room half an hour later.

‘Which was the hour of dinner,’ added the servant. ‘His highness dined at six in the summer season.’

Arthur went through the business of dressing with mixed feelings. It was an imperative duty to talk his best that evening, and he knew well enough that he could talk well when he chose. But his thoughts would wander to the mysterious adventure of the week before.

‘The prince dines at six in the summer season.’

He repeated these words to himself several times without any possibility of attaching a dubious meaning. His host might be married, a bachelor, or widowed. One thing seemed certain—he was now alone.

‘Arthur,’ said Hervey, putting his head in at his neighbour’s door, when half-way

through his toilette. 'Now you won't stay here after to-morrow, will you?'

'Don't be a fool!' was Arthur's unflattering retort. 'The Black Lake can wait, and Flora can wait. Never refuse good company and good fare when you can get them.'

Arthur's surmises were true. When they descended to the dazzling little octagon room, lighted only from above, its sole adornment a series of frescoes, they found the prince unattended. His secretary, who came in a moment later, made up the quartette.

'It is the first time I have had the honour of entertaining any of your countrymen here,' began the prince, blandly; 'and, indeed, I know not if my art collection has ever been visited by an English amateur. What Englishman has not seen

the moon rise on the Pyramids, and the sun refuse to set at Hammerfest? You set off for the North Pole as unconcernedly as for Epsom Races. But all pass my islet by.'

'Fortunately for your highness!' replied Arthur, quickly. 'Did people know what it is like, the park you so magnanimously throw open would be as crowded as the Prater on Whit-Monday.'

This beginning made all things easy; and when was a dinner-party of four agreeable men otherwise than perfect? There is an abandonment to which mere social reunions of both sexes cannot attain; within the limits of entire discretion in speech and deportment, a freedom, if not from restraint, at least from the desire of pleasing, which must actuate men when placed beside women at the dinner-table.

These genial diners were one and all as far removed from undue exhilaration as could be. Yet the pleasure that may honestly arise from the enjoyment of matchless wines and rare meats comes into stronger relief than at mixed assemblies. Princes are bound to get at knowledge by short cuts; and Arthur soon found that he was being affably drawn out on many subjects useful to an art collector. His pleasant host, by the time dinner was over, knew as much about the last phases of artistic development in England and France as if he had expended time and eyesight upon all the best publications of a twelve-month. What would you have? We humble folks surely do not expect to be bidden to princely tables for nothing!

Arthur Venning, artist and art-critic

in a fastidious, limited field, was a capital talker on his own subjects. He just escaped being called an amateur, but his work both on paper and canvas, whilst unpretentious in the extreme, possessed qualities many who had made much more of a name might envy. Alike his drawing and his writing showed consummate skill and finish. He knew what form was, a rare achievement; and, had he been poor or ambitious, would doubtless have attained much more.

‘I cannot permit you to go away to-morrow,’ said the prince, when the quartette smoked cigarettes on the balcony. (What desecration to smoke amid such roses! thought Arthur, who was not wedded to the pastime.) ‘You really must remain one night more.’

Arthur accepted delightedly. Hervey

tried to look as if the proposal were to his mind.

Their host went on.

‘I am compelled to go in the forenoon to my hunting-box in the forest, and the thought has occurred to me that perhaps Mr. Hervey Venning would like to drive, whilst Mr. Arthur Venning might prefer to be left behind among the pictures.’

‘The very privilege I could have asked!’ Arthur said. ‘The fact is, with your highness’s leave, I should like to make a few notes of your great masters for the benefit of art-lovers at home.’

‘Do exactly as you please,’ answered the prince, evidently charmed at the notion that the fame of his collection would now reach English ears.

‘A Velasquez in a remote islet inhabit-

ed by a handful of fishermen ! Your phlegmatic countrymen will be astonished, eh !'

'They will come to see,' put in Hervey, mischievously.

'All the better. How the English are loved everywhere on the continent ! How they spend money and fatten us !' laughed the prince, gaily. Then with almost a rollicking air he went on to say that, having in view the prosperity of the island and a good investment, he contemplated building a big hotel and bath just outside the park and a casino within its very precincts, finally laying down a railway to the landing-place over against the continent.

Arthur looked positively shocked. Was the last little Eden in Europe to be handed over to the tourist by contract ? This

earthly paradise, if any existed, to be invaded by the building speculator? Every imaginable horror passed before his mind, shrill-voiced elderly ladies with their courier and poodle, transatlantic explorers in bands of fifty, the typical English pater-familias with his correct family, the ladies stiff as whalebone, the bustle, the artificiality, the vulgarness of Swiss travel brought to these idyllic woods on the shores of the Baltic!

‘Mr. Venning does not seem taken with my plan,’ continued the host, as he gracefully scattered the ashes of his cigarette among the roses. ‘But is not taste a Moloch that devours us? Would not an art-lover sell the mummy of his grandmother for an Old Master? And we must all live! ’

As soon as it grew dusk they went

indoors and dawdled through the splendid salons, glancing at this chef-d'œuvre and that. Arthur looked and listened for a sign of feminine presence, but none came. No women were to be seen anywhere. No delicate belongings indicated even the occasional sojourn of a mistress. And, as the evening wore on, the prince accidentally alluded to his celibate condition. Still Arthur's mind would revert to his adventure with mixed feelings of relief and curiosity. It was pretty certain that no reference would now be made to the circumstances of his first visit. The woman servant who had opened to him was nowhere to be seen, nor a trace of the beautiful sitter. The prince was evidently in ignorance of the whole affair. These reflections were welcome, but he could not resign himself to the thought that the

mystery should end there. He must find out who this lady was, and unravel the secret of her sadness and her isolation.

But the prince was going to carry Hervey off to the hunting-box in the forest next day; he should have the palace to himself—he would by some means or other solve the problem.

It was late when the party separated, yet Arthur had no inclination for sleep. Vague foreshadowings of trouble disquieted him, and the realities of the day were not altogether agreeable. We cannot put our thoughts into plain language when under a strange roof, but Arthur had already discovered without a word that on one point he and Hervey were of the same mind. They did not feel unreservedly drawn towards their host. Charm-

ing as he was, a man of culture and of the world, much travelled, an apt talker, gay, cosmopolitan, something was wanting, just that undefinable something we must have in our friends.

And, as Arthur lay pondering in the midnight silence, he seemed to find in this character he was studying just the glimmering of light, the key he wanted.

‘Yes,’ he said to himself at last, ‘I have a clue to my mystery. How indeed can a man choose but carry about with him his life-story written in his face?’

CHAPTER XIV.

MYSTERY.

THE travellers woke up to find a perfect day wedded to a perfect place. Within and without prevailed deliciousness. Light showers had fallen during the night, sprinkling the roses with diamonds, whilst, as the sun rose high in the heavens, the fragrance of the lime-trees was wafted warmly throughout the length and breadth of the park, under the majestic alleys of silver fir and pine, and in the dappled glades far away were coolness and shadow,

alike palace, rose-garden, and fairy lake lay in warm sunshine. The white statues amid glistening green leaves, the exotics wreathing airy columns, the silvery fountains springing from marble basins, the glow of richness, warmth, and beauty were enough to make a beholder fancy himself in Italy. And, wander whichever way he might, his eyes would find the sea on this superlative July morning, clear turquoise lapping golden sands.

Close about the palace, all loveliness and witchery reached their acmé; yet the picture was incomplete—it wanted a beautiful woman. So at least Arthur thought, as he lingered among the statuary and the orange-trees before going indoors to revel in another kind of enchantment. He could not conceive of any man taking pleasure in such a place alone. Such

camellias should grow for a girl's fair head, such roses should put the finishing touch to the dress of a beauty. The orangery looked cold for want of an exquisite gown.

The prince had carried Hervey off be-times, saying they should not be back till dinner-time, so that Arthur had the day and the place to himself. He was free to do as he pleased, and wander whither he would.

At last he went indoors, and, in accordance with his host's suggestion, very carefully and observantly made the round of the state drawing-rooms.

Amid the works of art that met his eyes on every side—a Canova here, a Thorwaldsen there, sculpture predominating in this room—his attention was soon riveted by a man's head in marble, evi-

dently a modern chef-d'œuvre, and the likeness of a face he seemed to know. He looked and looked and looked again. Where had he seen that well-shaped head, that cold yet admirable contour, that well-proportioned throat ?

He started and smiled. It was the prince himself ! How was it that he now for the first time discovered his host to be one of the handsomest men he had ever seen ? Stooping down, he found the name of an Italian sculptor engraved on the base, and in juxtaposition the word '*Roma*,' with a date. The bust had been executed seven years before, and in the interval the model had grown a beard, quite reason enough for non-recognition at first sight.

But the excellence of the work, considered from an artistic point of view, fascinated. It was a masterpiece both of

design and execution, a striking achievement of imaginative as well as critical faculties of a high order. Opening his sketch-book, he amused himself by making a copy. So absorbed he grew in his task that when, half an hour later, the door behind him was unclosed softly, he did not observe the sound. As soon, however, as a footfall touched the polished floor close by his chair, he turned carelessly round to see who the intruder might be.

The genial occupation of the last half-hour had driven all irrelevant thoughts and stray conjectures out of his head. Bent solely on making a fair copy of the fine piece of sculpture before him, not once had the dominant fancy of the day before disturbed his mood.

The sad, ineffably lovely apparition in

black was for the moment forgotten ; on a sudden she was there, looking sadder, even more beautiful than before.

She wore the same kind of dress—noiseless, nun-like drapery of funereal black, only relieved by a white lace kerchief knotted about the throat, and on her bosom a bunch of the white starry flowers Arthur knew, the rare flowers he had found growing on the island. He sprang to his feet, overcome with surprise and pleasure. He was about to speak, to explain, to apologise, when, without a word, the lady silenced him.

‘ Do not speak to me—do not look at me,’ her face said, as she swiftly and noiselessly crossed the room. No written mandate plainer, no vehement utterance more imperative than the glance she gave him as she drew near.

He stood dumbfounded, yet secretly on the alert. In silence the charge was given, in silence the pledge accorded. So far the two entirely understood each other. But the little scene did not end here. Arthur's naturally quick perceptions, sharpened by the lady's meaning glance, told him that her coming was not accidental, that she had something further to say to him. He watched her passage from one end of the room to the other, therefore, with apparently careless, yet vigilant eyes, waiting for a further sign.

The manner of giving it was simple. As the black-robed figure now traversed the salon from end to end, she was obliged to pass the chair on which he had deposited his note-books and sketching-blocks. So deftly and noiselessly that the action must have been unperceived even had others

been by, she here let fall from her hand a folded paper, then passed on. Arthur sprang forward to open the opposite door, waited automatically to close it upon her, and returned to his bust as if nothing had happened. The lady's manner impressed upon him the necessity of extreme caution, so that he durst not venture on taking any notice of the missive for the present. Not till a fair silhouette had been made and the sketch-book laid down, could he contrive to satisfy his curiosity.

There were only a few pencilled words in English, and they were these :

‘I have something to say to you. By the iron-bound oak on the eastern confines of the park we could talk unobserved in an hour’s time.’

In an hour’s time! Arthur now set to work upon his memoranda with extraordin-

ary zeal. What would the prince think if he should find nothing done during his absence? A whole long summer day and not a note worth mentioning! So, with desperate determination to put away all conjecture and all personality for three quarters of an hour, he began to jot down a few critical remarks upon the great pictures in the gallery.

For nothing short of a picture gallery was this sumptuous reception-room, and as he passed from canvas to canvas he found the minutes fly despairingly fast. He should have to stay another day at the palace, and what would Hervey say to that? Still three-quarters of an hour may be turned to excellent account when the faculties are sharpened by mixed feelings of bewilderment and responsibility. Arthur was bound to keep his word to his

host. He was all the same bound to obey a lady's bidding. By the time he must set off in search of the iron-bound oak he had covered a dozen pages with apt and serviceable notes. The eastern confines of the park lay far away from the palace and its enticing precincts, in an inland direction.

Here instead of close-shaven lawns and stately avenues, fairy dells and winding walks, was a wilderness of tangled grass and undergrowth. The wild deer might be seen sporting amid these solitudes, and as far as the eye could reach stretched the interminable forest.

Where indeed the park ended, the forest began. Arthur's quick eye soon discerned an ancient oak with straggling, leafless branches and battered sides pieced together by massive iron bands. There was a moss-

grown rustic seat under its branches, but umbrageous shadow no longer, and the birds and butterflies had long forsaken it. Bare and desolate it stood in its hoary age, a Lear of the forest world !

Without glancing round, Arthur seated himself on the wooden bench, and, pulling out a sketch-book, began to draw the picturesque scene before him. How could he feel sure that he was not watched ?

The meeting must appear purely accidental to possible observers.

As he waited, putting many surmises and suggestions together, light dawned on his mind. He seemed hardly to need any explanation on the part of the lady now. Her history had already revealed itself to him. He felt sure that he knew the saddest and weightiest things she had to tell. By-and-by, he saw her coming.

If so lovely in her sadness, what must she be in a moment of joy !

For the life of him, Arthur could not help putting down his sketch-book, and gazing at the picture she made as she emerged from the wood.

It was, above all, the dignity of the black-robed figure that struck him then. A woman may be perfect without absolute beauty, if she possesses this admirable gift of dignity ; and, not possessing it, wants all things in certain fastidious eyes. Arthur Venning could not remember having seen anyone who so nearly approached his ideal of feminine excellence. The look, the manner, the indescribable something that makes every human being what he is, were faultless to his thinking ; the pathetic wistfulness and look of appeal heightening her beauty.

All was impressive, not to be matched, still less forgotten or described.

Agitated and expectant, he sprang to his feet, and bared his head as she drew near.

CHAPTER XV.

REVELATION.

SHE made a sign to him to be seated, and, sitting down also, began without preamble.

‘Will you do something for me, when you get back to England?’ Then, looking straight into his face, she added, with painful eagerness, ‘That forlorn lady I mentioned to you, who wants to gain her bread in your country, is myself. Can you help me?’

What could Arthur do but express his

readiness, his devotion? Only let her wishes be made known, and he would exert himself to the utmost to serve her, he stammered forth, alert to the deliciousness of the situation, yet prosaically alive to the difficulties of the task he was imposing upon himself. Without sisters, without feminine kinsfolk, he was surely the last person in the world who should proffer help to a lady in such straits. Despite his prompt affirmation, just a shade of discomposure was visible to the eyes intently watching his own.

‘I am asking a great kindness, I know,’ she went on, speaking in the same quiet, almost despairing voice. ‘I have no one to say a good word for me; not a friend in the world, yet I must live.’

Again she looked at Arthur as if to read him through and through; then,

evidently with a growing confidence and almost a feeling of liking, she went on.

‘Your looks tell me that you have a kind heart, and I am sure you are honourable. I will therefore trust you so far. You must find me such service in your country as may be performed by those who have no past, no history. Oh!’ she cried, her whole sorrowful soul seeming to lean on him in the extremity of her helplessness and desolation. ‘Surely in England if anywhere I may find one large heart to whom a woman is a woman still in spite of such misfortunes as mine.’

A tear or two fell, but without wiping them away she hurried on, now in eager tones,

‘None but yourself are to know that I have lost my good name. I am bound to

tell you or you could not help me. You will keep silence, I know.'

Arthur's looks answered for him. He was fain to be eloquent, but the words did not come ; none seemed weighty enough for the occasion.

'There are many things I can do well,' she continued, with plaintive earnestness, 'I would fulfil any trust committed to me. I would be good to little children or sick folk. But there is one charge I would like best of all.' Then, smiling through her tears, she said, 'It is a foolish fancy ! I cannot help living in terror of people's eyes ! If I could only minister to the blind in one of their asylums, or devote myself to some sightless person, I think I could grow almost happy again.'

'You must be happy again,' Arthur re-

joined, with affected cheerfulness, although his heart was sinking within him. This superb creature a hospital nurse, a serving-woman! The thought was not to be borne.

‘Have you any blind friend?’ she asked, artlessly, not in the least divining what track his thoughts had taken. ‘I am skilled in music. I have a fine voice, so people say; I know many things.’

‘That is but a dreary prospect you speak of,’ Arthur said, ‘I will try to think of a better scheme. There are rich women in England who want a friend to travel with them, dispense charity for them, help them to make the best of their lives. Among these you may find one who would be as a sister to you.’

The glimmer of hope that had lighted up her face died away, and she shook her

head and made answer, almost in a desponding tone,

‘I cannot go into the world, and even good women might not be kind to me. I yearn for a little kindness. But I will not be cast down,’ she added, as she caught Arthur’s sorrowful glance. ‘You hear how easily I speak your language. I am also learned in Italian.’

‘That reminds me,’ Arthur broke in, with extreme animation, ‘I think I do know an old lady, charming, too, who wants a young one to take her to Italy,’ and he expatiated on the prospect all the more glowingly because it had also occurred to him that he should very likely spend the winter in Rome himself.

Suddenly, however, he was checked by a look of such utter misery on his com-

panion's face as to seal his lips. He sat still blank, silent, dejected. Not an adequate word occurred to him, not a phrase in the whole vocabulary seemed delicate enough and emphatic enough for the expression of his chivalrous devotion. No dilemma could be more painful to a generous-minded man.

Moved to passionate pity, stirred by feelings perhaps the nearest approach to magnanimity of a life-time, he was yet frozen into silence, chilled to outer coldness by the very sorrow he would fain console. To a man like Arthur Venning, nice in his tastes even to fastidiousness, and moulded, although he knew it not, rather according to his own standard than that of the world, the very helplessness and appeal of this beautiful woman made her sacred in his eyes. She had thrown

herself on his sense of honour and manliness, and he must take care lest by a look or syllable he might seem to abuse the confidence placed in him.

He durst not offer balm or ruth. Even a trivial expression of sympathy would be out of keeping. He could only hearken to her story and vouchsafe the common kindness one wayfarer on the dusty high-road of life is bound to show another.

‘Do not speak to me of Italy!’ she cried.
‘It is a fatal place. The forfeit of a soul.’

For a moment the fair cheeks were dyed with crimson, then she broke off, and went on, proudly and collectedly,

‘You have promised to help a forlorn lady to earn her bread. If I am more outspoken to you than I should be, if I confide things to you I ought hardly to confide to anyone, much less a man and a

stranger, it is because, from my childhood upwards, I have been taught that an Englishman's word may be relied on.'

Arthur listened with sealed lips.

'He had spoken once on his own behalf. Would a dozen speeches lend force to his single yea or nay ?

'You cannot help me unless you know something of my history,' she went on, hurriedly and fearfully, as if dreading lest time might not serve for all that she had to say. 'I have not a friend in the world, and I am in the power of bad people. How can I leave this island and get secretly to England? Will you try to think of a plan? Englishwomen are great travellers. If any came here I could return with them.'

The wistfulness, the almost agonized look of entreaty wrung Arthur's heart.

All kinds of projects flashed before his mind. He would write that very day to some of his pleasant woman-friends, and urge upon them the seductions of a Baltic trip. Better still, he would think of some schoolmistress or music teacher in want of a holiday, and thus procure the necessary protection. Vague hopes and promises in plenty his interlocutor now read in the young man's face.

'It must be done soon,' she added, in the same quick, agitated tones. 'I could get away in September.'

Arthur's countenance cleared.

'There is fortunately time, then, for making the necessary arrangements,' he said, promptly and cheerfully. He was determined, at all costs to himself, to be sternly matter-of-fact. 'I can turn over in my mind the best means of furthering

your wishes. Meantime,' he added, with an encouraging smile, 'who can tell what may or may not happen? Friends of mine might arrive, unexpectedly, any day from England, or touch here on their way back from Norway. I need only commend to their protection a foreign lady desirous of going to England. Can I write to you ?'

'It will be better not to do so. I will let you know how to communicate with me when the time comes,' she replied, rising. 'How long do you stay on this island ?'

'As long as I can serve you,' were the passionate words on Arthur's lips. He checked himself, and made answer, in the most indifferent voice he could command, 'My time is at my own disposal. I am absolutely free to go or stay. It will give

me real pleasure if I can be of use to you.'

'I will send you a sign,' she said. 'Your address I learned on the occasion of your first visit to the palace.'

'The address matters little. But do not forget the name—Arthur Venning. A letter bearing that superscription will find me anywhere on the island.'

'And my prayers shall find you wherever you are,' was the tearful answer.

As she lingered before him, so beautiful in her sadness, so sad in her beauty, they interchanged the yearning look that one human being may well accord another in moments of supreme emotion, even when the next shall see them strangers. There was no sentiment on his part, no feminine feeling on hers ; instead, deep, unutterable sympathy stirring the hearts of both, and

an understanding with which his passionate admiration, his own consciousness of it, had nothing to do.

Never in his life had anything touched him so nearly as this loneliness, this desolation ; not until now did she realise the healing there may be in a brave man's word. For once, sex and personality were merged in something higher than these, and the pair embodied in each other's eyes divine compassion and intense gratitude only. And, as if anxious to express an emotion she could not put into words, having risen to go, she turned back. With a little sob and a wistful smile, she now unfastened the knot of white flowers worn on her bosom and put them into his hands. What eloquence could have said so much ? Those silvery, star-shaped blossoms were the thanks-

giving of one who had not so much as a word to give, the benison of a breaking heart.

Strangely moved, Arthur put away the flowers in his pocket-book, and strolled back to the palace, with little heart for the jovial bachelor's dinner to come. He longed now as keenly as Hervey to be well out of these precincts, although the way back should lead to perplexity, retribution, and Elizabeth.

Elizabeth ! Elizabeth ! What was there in a fair girl's name to disquiet a young man thus ? But even the name he had first found so sweet seemed unreal and remote to Arthur now. Was the fancy of yestreen already supplanted by a deeper feeling ? Was the new empire love indeed, the other dream and shadow ?

Arthur came to the conclusion, whilst

hopelessly distracted by these thoughts, that at least he was no longer free to wander and to love. He had often regretted the unemotional current of his existence, and even reproached himself for an apparent want of susceptibility in the passions that consume other men. Now love had asserted its claim, and instead of scant measure dealt out to him, a very foison of love and deliciousness promised to be his portion.

But the future lay veiled in mystery.
Hid are the threads of destiny !

CHAPTER XVI.

INTERLUDES.

THE rest of the visit passed off uneventfully—the same faultless dinners, the same flow of talk, the same acquisitiveness on the part of host and response on that of guests.

In certain social relations there need be no question of personal liking. We accord or accept hospitality without going below sympathies skin-deep, and inclinations that lie on the surface. The prince and his visitors parted company with graceful compliments that meant nothing,

and expressions of regard called forth by the occasion. They should never meet again, but had done their best to be agreeable to each other whilst intercourse lasted. Next day, before nightfall, the travellers were in their old quarters.

Hervey hastened down to the hanging-garden by the shore, hoping to find Flora under the lime-trees. Arthur shut himself up in his room, to ponder over the letter he must write at once and despatch by to-morrow's boat.

First of all, he thought and thought till he had satisfactorily made out the history of his beautiful suppliant. He knew German middle-class life well: the intellectualism of it; the sordid penury of it; and, viewed by the light of past experience, it seemed to him perfectly comprehensible that Italy might

be as the apple to some beautiful and beauty-loving German Eve born in these latter days. A vivid picture soon composed itself before his mental eye. He imagined a struggling family, and perhaps narrow-minded circle, of which one gifted girl was the paragon, condemned, nevertheless, to a treadmill of toil for daily bread. On a sudden, the prison doors fly open. Love and Italy await her! The artistic cravings and intellectual aspirations, suppressed for years, are to be satisfied at last. She loves, and in her lover finds not only the beauty which is to her as a religion, but the sympathy as necessary to an ardent and poetic nature as air itself.

Musing thus, Arthur thought he could understand how here even a delicate-minded and proud maiden might fall into

a snare. There would be passion on the man's side, and no lack of arguments on behalf of the sacrifice demanded of her. Might not a young nobleman, wooing the daughter of some poor pastor or professor, plausibly plead his cause thus : 'I am not now my own master ; but the bond between us two shall be sacred, and the first day that makes me umpire of my fortunes shall seal it in the eyes of men.' And to the mind of an unworldly, magnanimous girl, implicitly trusting her lover's word, the very nature of such a bond would seem to guarantee after confirmation. Other and subtler reasonings on his part might apparently justify the step. A thousand circumstances might go against her. Is not feminine generosity overreached by a man's reckless word every day ?

Arthur sat down to write with the unshakable conviction that his protégée was the victim, not the tool, of a worldling's selfishness. If ever a fair spirit matched a beauteous frame, it was hers. The pathos of wrong rather than of remorse was written on her face. More sinned against than sinning was inscribed on that pure forehead. Were it otherwise, cannot mortal lapse be washed out with bitter tears? Is not the misguided soul ofttimes nearer the angels than those who keep the beaten track?

With such thoughts as these, Arthur penned a very long letter indeed on this lady's behalf. He had bethought himself of a former music-mistress of his own, of whom he had never lost sight, as the very person to help him out of this charming

dilemma. She was pinched in circumstances, elderly, and not too rich in friends. It would be easy, he thought, to induce her to give the stranger a home, even make the journey from London to escort her, if necessary.

Arthur was by no means rich, but he could lay hands on a hundred pounds in order to gratify a generous whim, and he reflected that, if he put two seas between his beautiful charge and her sorrow, the rest would be easy. She would learn to forget. Under his friend's quiet roof there would be nothing to recall the past. She should be amused by giving German lessons. She should gradually be won over to smile and hope.

There was real benevolence, as well as a chivalrous sentiment, at the bottom of Arthur's schemes, and the thought struck

him oddly, as it might, methinks, strike many another, when did I ever go out of my way to mend a breaking heart? This fastidious, easy-going, highly-cultured Londoner possessed a conscience, but, somehow or other, it had not been touched as often as might be. Yet the chivalrous feeling here predominated, and it could hardly be otherwise. If the consciousness of a kindly act warmed his heart, the gratitude of a beautiful woman in no less degree warmed his imagination.

A deeper chord was touched still. This girl had appealed to all that was best and manliest within him, and, in responding to the call, he felt that she it was who played the part of benefactor and good genius. Are not those who inspire us with a noble impulse our guardian-angels?

The letter he penned was a very long and deliberate one, and in its folds was enclosed a cheque.

‘It may happen,’ he wrote by way of postscript, ‘that I shall have to telegraph to you quite suddenly to come out here, or, which will be as well, delegate some one of your acquaintance to do so, in order to accompany this lady back to England. Why she cannot travel alone and all other questions I will answer when we meet. The only thing to be thought of now is to procure her an escort and a home till she can decide upon what to do in the future. She is to know nothing about this cheque, of course. As an old friend of mine, you will offer her shelter for a few weeks. That explanation will be enough, and at this season of the year your journey hither would have nothing extraordi-

nary about it. I am sure you will go out of your way to second an old pupil whom you scolded for false notes twenty years ago. And you will learn to feel as much interest in my protégée as I do. But take no step till you hear from me.'

Most carefully and circumstantially was the letter worded, yet strangely enough, when the moment came to consign it to the post, Arthur locked it up in his desk instead.

This little romance was all his own. He could not bear the thought of another so much as breathing on it. And the natural feminine curiosity of this soft-hearted music-mistress, a romance herself, albeit travestied by the embonpoint of fifty, would any injunction on his part suffice to keep down her inquisitiveness?

Terribly, yet rapturously perplexed, he

at last decided to leave the letter where it was for the present. There was luckily yet time, and in the summer post-bags crossed these seas every day. He could afford to dwell on the problem a little longer.

Next morning Hervey dashed into his room with great news. The fisherman's ball was to take place that afternoon in the forest. Everybody was going and the sight would be captivating, he said, all in a breath.

‘Everybody? That means Flora?’ Arthur said, slyly. ‘Seriously, now, Hervey. What are you thinking of? Flirtation has its limits! A man to contemplate marriage who has never so much as earned a sixpence with which to pay his boot cleaner!’

Hervey was also in an exhilarated humour.

‘I never coveted a carriage and pair,’ he answered. ‘When I take a wife, fashion and I part company.’

‘A man may be a decent member of society without having his clothes made by a fashionable tailor,’ laughed Arthur. ‘But nakedness must be covered, and the digestive machine kept a-going.’

‘You forget one thing,’ retorted the younger brother. ‘Flora is a German, and Germans know how to live delightfully upon a hundred a year. You will go to the ball, of course?’

‘Of course. Will Elizabeth dance with me, do you think?’

Hervey looked disconcerted.

‘I do not understand Elizabeth,’ he said. ‘She seems positively to resent our visit to the palace. How could it possibly be interpreted as a slight upon herself?’

‘How indeed?’ was Arthur’s careless answer, but when Hervey had left him, his thoughts recurred to the question he had mooted. Why had Elizabeth all along showed such strange aversion to the prince’s name? Arthur recollects well her look of disconcertment when the princely chace had been accidentally mentioned. There was no misreading the cold disapproval written on her face just before his departure with Hervey for the palace.

Then he recalled their talk at the light-house. She had spoken of a broken word and outraged honour. Could these things point to but one conclusion? The lovely ingenuous Elizabeth must have been wooed by one of the prince’s kinsmen, and through his instrumentality, he being head of the house, such betrothals had been annulled. In Elizabeth’s eyes the prince evidently

embodied disloyalty itself, in no other way was such bitter feeling on the part of an amiable girl to be accounted for. He determined to have a close talk with Elizabeth as soon as might be, that very afternoon if possible. It behoved him to get at the bottom of her mysteries and to find out how it stood with her heart; for in the midst of these vague reflections a disturbing conviction made itself heard. He had already gone too far to draw back. Those last lover-like words whispered in her ear could not be misinterpreted or unsaid. He was free no longer.

Now Arthur, without possessing the heroic qualities, was endowed with one virtue which often counts for much more. To his somewhat cold, well-disciplined nature, crookedness was simply impossible in the least little thing. He must see whither he was going and have the ground clear, no

complications, no half understandings, least of all, no shufflings. The thought that his extraordinary interest in his beautiful protégée might be disloyal to Elizabeth grew more and more hateful to him.

He could not let a day go by in uncertainty. Either Elizabeth should claim him for once and for all, or he would be left to that sadder, lovelier vision that somehow strangely reminded him of her.

Arthur had doubtless a touch of romance in his disposition. What human being is without it? Taken by this sweet Teutonic maiden as he had never been taken by any other woman till a week ago, he yet acknowledged a feeling of dismay.

Love is sweet, and the look of certain blue eyes may open a new kind of heaven

in manly breasts. But habit is tyrannical and liberty hath charms. To fall in love is to catch a first glimpse of Edelweiss on Alpine slopes. To determine on marriage is to strive for the prize, maybe easily won and worn, maybe a clutch at a bagatelle or a smiling plunge into destruction !

CHAPTER XVII.

IDYLLS.

NOTHING could be prettier than the rustic jollity prepared for the fisher folk for their guests. The site chosen was a fair open space in the very heart of the forest, with park-like knolls and beechen groves affording rich shadow round about. A smooth circle of golden sward was set apart for the dancers, and a little beyond, the flame of gipsy fires and fisher-maidens bustling about tables covered with snowy napkins betokened the preparation of coffee.

On the lower branches of the encircling trees were hung Chinese lanterns which lent the trees a festive look, the effect of the bright colours being heightened by the gay dresses of the ladies. The celebration was entirely popular, and rich and poor turned out to take part in it, but as costume exists no longer even in the Cannibal Islands, it could hardly be looked for here. The fair-haired, apple-cheeked daughters of these sturdy islanders, descendants of pirate kings of the olden time, were dressed every whit as modishly as the belles of northern capitals who had come so far in search of the picturesque. Not an outlandish head-gear to be seen, not one pig-tailed, short-kilted Gretchen among the bevy of home-bred beauties, nor were the men bedizened after the manner of their forefathers. The chimney-

pot hat, the frock coat, the pantalon, formed the Sunday dress of the poorest. After all, let æsthetes tear their hair and wring their hands over the vanished costumes that made the world so pretty if they will. All who care for the moral uplifting and social regeneration of our poorer brethren know that deepest wisdom and highest promise underlie this imitative instinct on their part. When all the world are clothed like ladies and gentlemen, all the world will strive after the ideal contained in the words, not the least feature of which is decorum and gentleness in speech and behaviour. By dress is the divine doctrine of Equality to be preached from one end of the globe to the other. Here, moreover, Equality was no fiction even on Prussian soil. The fisherman might invite a titled Fräulein to the waltz, the village

girl without shame accept the hand of a grande^e for the cotillon. All was geniality and neighbourly feeling.

Arthur and Hervey were soon busy among the coffee-cups, serving not only Elizabeth and Flora, but any womankind who happened to be handy. Then, flushed with the heat of the gipsy fires, and breathless with running to and fro in company of other cavaliers, they made raids upon the cakes piled on neighbouring stalls. It was a scene of indescribable enjoyment. Everybody was hot, not a gown without its tear, yet all faces showed exhilaration. Why merry-making out of doors should always raise our spirits may be accounted for in the fact that Nature compels naturalness, strive against her as we will. The foot-mark of fauns and satyrs still lingers in the forest. Some-

thing, we know not what, reminds us that the pranksome world of Eld hath not wholly vanished.

By-and-by, according to local fashion, the procession formed for the dance, young and old making the round of the woodland cirque in couples, to the slow time of music. Hervey, enchanted, led off Flora; Arthur, somewhat crestfallen, saw Elizabeth already paired with an elderly partner, no other than the fisherman at whose house she lodged. This worthy personage never danced but once a year, and always upon these occasions, demanded the hand of the prettiest guests in the place, a favour readily accorded, as he was a famous boatman, and well known to all. But the luck ran against Arthur. Dressed in white, with blue corn-flowers in her hair and on her bosom, Elizabeth

seemed possessed by the very genius of dancing just then. She had hardly dismissed her first partner when another came up, a grey-haired colonel, a hotel acquaintance, to claim a promise of three weeks' standing; then a little lad, who had been similarly favoured; then a still younger child, just able to toddle through the quadrille.

Sparkling, animated, rosy, Elizabeth had evidently made up her mind to fling care to the winds for that afternoon. Arthur fancied himself avoided, because he reminded her of things she would fain forget. He was determined, however, to have one dance, and patiently bided his turn. At last it came.

‘I began to think that you had made up your mind not to dance with me at all. Yet, if I had offended, I hoped it

was not past forgiveness,' he said, looking rapturously at the happy girl.

Not a five-year-old coquette in the sash and white frock showed more contentment than Elizabeth just then.

' You have not offended me. But I am bound to dance with all my particular friends. I have not danced for years. It delights me beyond measure.'

' Because you do it so beautifully.'

' Everyone dances well in our country, although, of course, some better than others. If you had only seen my sister !'

she said.

' I have been watching Miss Flora. I hardly think her performance comes up to the level of your own.'

' Oh ! I was not thinking of Flora, but of our eldest sister—the one we have lost,' cried the girl, colouring painfully.

A dark thought had overshadowed her bright mood against her will. The gaysome fit dropped from her like a garment. She would dance no more that day.

‘Look at Flora and your brother,’ Elizabeth said, as they rested under the lime-trees, within sight of the dancers. ‘Why cannot you and I be as light-hearted as those two?’

She had then detected his own pre-occupation and skin-deep carelessness, thought Arthur. How it fared with the pair of young lovers, waltzing just then so merrily, it was easy to see. Would a better opportunity come for finding out how it stood with themselves ?

‘That is a question no other can answer for us. Let us for once and for all get to the bottom of things. Speak—or listen,’ he said.

‘I have not the courage to speak, and, till I have spoken, I dare not listen,’ answered Elizabeth.

‘If summer lasted longer than two months in this sweet place, and life were all holiday, I should be the last person to rebel against such a state of things,’ rejoined Arthur. ‘Yet what more can this island give me than the thing I came to seek.’

‘But the sorrow I fled from follows me still. Flora is a child, and concerns herself about nothing so long as the sun shines. I cannot help looking deeper.’

‘The deeper you look the more valorous you should become,’ Arthur said. ‘Why this shrinking from me? Am I not your friend?’

‘Yes,’ said Elizabeth, firmly and almost affectionately, ‘I have no misgiving where

your loyalty is concerned. True you are, I am sure, and brave too. It is your very generosity that makes me hesitate. I fear to put it a test that might make even my friendship for you bitterness and rue.'

'Friendship ! friendship !' cried Arthur. 'May we not use a dearer, better word, you and I? So I have dreamed and hoped.'

'No, no,' Elizabeth made answer, evidently torn by inner conflict, shrinking, notwithstanding, from a stern sense of duty, the sweetness and solace implied in his words.

'I must not, I dare not let our intimacy go further. What room is there for better feelings in a heart overflowing with hate? We can be good friends, and some time or other I may summon up courage to un-

burden myself to you. But by word of mouth, never !'

' You shall write to me,' Arthur put in, kindly.

Strange, that with this beautiful girl, as with that other whose image was ever before his eyes, he had to play the part of consoler ! Elizabeth's sorrow seemed at times hardly less deep and absorbing than the grief of the unknown lady ; in both cases, how flatteringly welcome his consolation and sympathy.

' Some day or other you shall certainly have a letter from me,' Elizabeth said, smiling. ' You will then understand these foolish, childish thoughts I have often given utterance to in your hearing. Re-quital, revenge, and so forth. How absurd to count upon redress for such wrongs as mine ! How sinful to nurse in one's bosom

plans of vengeance and retribution ! We must oftentimes leave the wicked in God's hands.'

'And in the devil's !' laughed Arthur. 'That is to say, their evil conscience. Never fear that it does not sting.'

'Have all human beings a conscience, think you ?'

'Something that takes the place of one, anyhow. Something that makes people fear, and fear is hell. Otherwise, why do the most atrocious criminals ever show a craven spirit ?'

Arthur never doubted that Elizabeth was dwelling upon her own story ; she had been brought to trust an unworthy lover, and womanly pride, rather than outraged feeling, had spoken out now.

His words seemed to satisfy her.

'It must be so,' she mused. 'Otherwise

all the keenest pain would be endured by the true and the lofty-minded. God would not permit such an injustice. Surely the gall and bitterness of wickedness are tasted by the wicked themselves ?'

She lapsed into silence, and Arthur humoured her mood. These girlish confidences could but be very sweet, and if she had gently yet firmly degraded him from the rank of lover to friend, there was a melancholy consolation in that thought also. A newer, deeper interest was no longer a treachery to his feeling for her. He might freely indulge in other hopes and recollections. All things, at least for a time, were made clear as day between them.

When Elizabeth woke up from her reverie, her mood was altered ; she spoke now with alacrity, whether natural or affected he could not tell, and seemed

anxious to touch on lighter themes. She asked him a dozen questions about his stay at the lighthouse ; then, after having played round the subject, she led up to his late visit.

‘How captivating is our island ! and nowhere more so than on that southern part. And the lime-trees at the Residency !’ she cried. ‘In Berlin we boast of lindens that look as if they came out of a child’s toy village. Can the world show nobler trees than those in the prince’s park ?’

‘In good sooth, no,’ Arthur said, carried away by her evident enthusiasm. ‘And the palace itself, with its marble colonnades and rose-gardens about its fairy lake. I think I never saw a place that more struck my imagination.’

‘I have never been inside,’ Eliza-

beth went on, in calm, slightly artificial tones. ‘They tell me it is more captivating within than without—a reminder of Haroun-el-Raschid. Are these reports exaggerated?’

‘I do assure you not in the least,’ Arthur said, forgetting for the moment her apparent distaste to this very subject. ‘There is a Titian, a Tintoret, a Velasquez, and dazzling splendours of a modern date. All these you should see.’

Elizabeth listened coldly. It was quite clear that she wanted to learn more, but hesitated to show inquisitiveness.

‘Was the party at the palace an agreeable one?’ she asked.

‘We were but four,’ Arthur said—‘the prince, his secretary, my brother, and myself.’

Elizabeth’s face still betokened curiosity.

She turned red, then pale; finally taking up her fan, and using it as vigorously as if they were in a crowded drawing-room rather than in a cool forest nook, she got out the query,

‘Then the prince is not married’

CHAPTER XVIII.

A PASTORAL.

THE fisherman's ball ended for most folk at the children's bed-time, and whilst the sun yet gilded the rim of the upper forest-world, many were already wending their way homewards. How wonderful was the path, one of many, found by the too happy Flora and her knight, Hervey, as they separated themselves from their friends, determined to have at least this one walk to themselves.

Elizabeth would frown, and Flora was

in terror of her elder sister's righteous anger. Could Elizabeth's anger ever be otherwise? But to-day Flora felt a little reckless and even audacious. The dance out of doors, the feeling of festivity in the air, the music ringing through the woodland, exhilarated her beyond measure. She hoped, although she did not feel sure of it, that these things would in some degree affect Elizabeth also, and that she would make allowance for conduct arising from feelings she shared.

From the higher ground of the forest that had been chosen for the dance a dozen paths led homewards, and Flora, who acted as guide, naturally chose the most romantic, if indeed there was any choice in this island of romance. They first of all scrambled down the side of a charming little ravine,

the abrupt, tangled path landing them into a cool, quiet glade where not a sign reached them of the upper world or the lower; alike forest and sea were here utterly shut out from ken.

Flora laughingly put her finger to her lip, and, listening, Hervey caught a sound, a low, musical murmur of hidden waters, although as yet no rivulet or brook was to be seen.

‘We must find the brook and follow it, or we shall lose our way,’ Flora said, and on the other side of the glade, true enough, they soon discovered a little mountain rivulet trickling and tossing over a pebbly bed, making as much ado, indeed, as many a broad stream.

Down it ran between ferny banks and mossy stones, at every bend showing miniature cascades and weirs, the white

crests of the tumbling waters and the large, creamy agaric the only points of light in the dark picture. Here and there gleamed duskily deep orange peziza and other flowers of the under world, and, when they came to an opening, they caught sight of a sun-ray gilding the upper region now left far behind. Around them all was coolness and deep shadow, but no monotony, every bend of the little torrent leading into new scenes. Like a tricksy sprite playing at hide and seek, it now hid itself behind a huge tree-stem, now dived deep into a tiny combe, and now slowly and deliberately meandered amid sedges dark as itself.

This gruesome elf was up to a hundred antics, and never left the happy lovers for more than a minute or two at a time. It seemed to have a fellowship with their

captious, uncertain mood, sweetest mood, perhaps, in which lovers ever find themselves, as they stand on the brink of a perfect understanding, willing yet unwilling to attain it.

The artless girl knew as well as words could have told her what was on Hervey's lips, the secret of two or three delicious weeks hitherto not divulged by speech, and Hervey felt no misgivings, no playing with happy fate, no toying with sweet convictions on the part of this transparent-natured maiden. All with her was fair and legible, the blue eyes that opened to her lover's clear as a book. Flora's mission in the world was to love and to smile, no despicable one seeing how much the toiling, moiling world is in need of love and smiles.

Love came not so much as a surprise, per-

haps, to the eighteen-year-old Flora as to the London-bred man of the world, almost ten years her senior. Hervey had caught his brother's trick of jesting at serious things, courtship and marriage among them, without taking account of the deeper feeling underlying Arthur's apparent scepticism. In sober fact, Arthur only waited for a perfect woman to fall in love with and marry, and all the time Hervey listened to his jests in sober earnest, and acted upon them, Arthur kept a steady look-out lest his ideal should escape him. So impossible is it for the lesser nature to comprehend the larger. As a natural consequence, we who imitate our betters oftener aim at their weaknesses rather than their strong points.

Arthur had seemed to hold himself above sentiment, and Hervey could not

choose but follow suit. On a sudden he woke up to the discovery, and a pleasant one too, that, after all, his brother and himself were not superior beings, but prone to make themselves ridiculous, in other words, fall in love, like ordinary mortals. Thus they strayed homewards, following the stream, one moment shy and monosyllabic, the next audacious and voluble. They were quiet when the rivulet just plashed and that was all, the moment it battled noisily, they also became garrulous.

It had led them lower and lower and ever into deeper shadow; warm amber light still lingered about the high reaches of the forest, but their own little world, dusk and cool at all times, was now growing more and more obscure, the lovely green light turning every dell and

glade into a solemn place. With the bendings and windings of the rivulet they had passed from one scene of enchantment to another, and finally it landed them on to a grassy stage where the wood ended and the open, park-like spaces skirting it began.

One slope more and the corn-fields would be reached and the narrow little village street leading to the sea. Already they had before their eyes an arc of pale blue, and set round about, broad stretches of ripe yellow wheat. In helping his companion over the brooklet, Hervey had been obliged to take her hand, and somehow, after crossing it for the last time, he still retained his hold.

Flushed, sparkling, a stranger to herself in this moment of first girlish abandon-

ment, Flora saw that her lover was equally distracted and happy. Hervey seemed suddenly overtaken by extraordinary self-confidence. His dauntless demeanour and airy port should have belonged to one bent on a far more startling enterprise than the winning of a gentle maiden's hand. He looked indeed as if by anticipation he had already accomplished some tremendous exploit. Nothing magnifies us so much in our own estimation as first love, and Hervey and Flora were no less enchanted with each other and themselves than two little children just able to toddle, who have rubbed cheeks and made friends.

‘ You will let me speak to Elizabeth to-morrow, will you not?’ at last Hervey said, conscious of doing the beautiful

thing he had to do in the awkwardest manner possible.

Flora laughed gaily and arched her pretty brows.

‘You talk to Elizabeth every day without asking my leave,’ she said, then, blushing, she flitted like a shy little bird from the tempting snare. ‘I know what we shall both get to-morrow—a scolding.’

‘Nonsense,’ Hervey answered. ‘Elizabeth has no right to scold me, and soon she shall have no right to scold you either. Listen, be serious,’ he added, making her for a moment sit on the turf beside him. ‘Things are very desperate, Flora, I believe, between my brother and your sister, but anyhow between us two. I want you to marry me this very year.

Why wait,' he blurted out, 'since we love each other?'

Flora let one little hand rest within her lover's whilst she spoke out openly and daringly as himself. This new friend had on a sudden become so very close and dear! Her secrets must be his. In the least as well as the greatest of his concerns she was henceforth to bear a part. The sense of acquisition and enlargement that promptly took possession of her was sweet and bewildering.

'I dare not disobey Elizabeth,' she said, overcome with joyousness and sad misgiving both. 'If she separates us, I am bound to submit. But I shall always love you all the same.'

'Nonsense,' again urged Hervey, finding piquancy in the use of such unceremonious speech, already as he thought a guarantee

of the sweet unceremonious life to come. 'My little girl, my own Flora, you have only to say a word and not the whole world, much less Elizabeth, can separate us.'

Flora hearkened, blushing, tearful, blissful, yet unconvinced.

'Elizabeth made me promise long ago never to—to—to do anything without consulting her,' she stammered. 'Elizabeth says that I must never dream of marrying because of the misfortune and disgrace that have befallen our family.'

'Misfortune, disgrace,' cried the young man, sturdily, he had never felt so manful and self-confident in his life. 'Are you to be made unhappy because of the misdeeds of others? All the more reason why you should be loved and protected as I will love and protect you.'

The pair were alone in their little world of cool green and deepening shadow, not so much as a bird to espy their doings. Quite pardonably Hervey caught her for a moment lover-like in his arms and snatched a first kiss from her rosy lips.

‘Say all that to Elizabeth,’ Flora whispered.

‘But I deny Elizabeth’s right to interfere,’ Hervey went on. ‘When Arthur asks her to marry him, as of course he will, take my word for it, she will never dream of consulting you.’

‘Elizabeth is five years older than I am.’

‘And Arthur is my senior also. Brothers and sisters have no jurisdiction over each other and only self-assumed authority. I never dreamed, for instance, of telling

Arthur that I intended to speak to you to-day.'

'With men it is different,' Flora said. 'We have no mother, remember, and our father is incapable of taking care of us. It is Elizabeth's affection, not her love of authority that makes her seem to domineer. She says that we are bound to disclose our family history before accepting an offer of marriage.'

'Marry me first and I will listen to as much family history as you like afterwards,' Hervey said, growing more and more defiant. 'Or at least promise to marry me.'

'No, Elizabeth would be displeased. But I promise never to marry anyone else,' Flora answered.

'I will talk to your sister. I will win her over. Arthur may say that my means

are insufficient, but we will be very economical. I am sure two people can be as happy as the day is long on three hundred a year.'

Flora opened her blue eyes with childish delight. The sum had a handsome, nay, magnificent sound in her German ears. Three hundred a year indeed. She would undertake to keep house on one!

'Not in England,' laughed Hervey, and so they prattled on about marriage and money and the countless topics that after the first whisper of love, become common property. Then, all at once aroused to the fact that the woods had grown very dark and night was alarmingly near, they hastened home with the air of belated children who expect a whipping.

CHAPTER XIX.

CATASTROPHES.

AND next day, Sunday, how blessed were the young lovers as they attended divine service in the open air; forest-church, as the island folk called it, for no other was near. Baptisms, bridals, and burials were solemnized in the dome of the little cathedral that, perched on its airy height, could be seen from almost every part of the island; and in winter, resolute church-goers, from remote villages, plodded thither through the snow, the undertaking

only just being accomplished in the brief winter day. When leaves were green, and mossy banks afforded pleasant resting-places, nothing more delightful than this woodland temple. A kind of amphitheatre had been made in the forest; the pastor's gown and cassock were hanging on a tree hard by in readiness, and when the congregation had patiently awaited his arrival for half-an-hour and more, at last he came.

How Flora's sweet, well-trained voice thrilled with joy, as she joined in the grand old Lutheran hymn by her lover's side! How rapturously the young Londoner gave way to these naïve, genuine emotions! Perhaps the sermon fell on careless ears; but the prayer in which they joined seemed a sacred bond in this forest aisle.

What passed afterwards between the

sisters, Hervey did not learn as yet, but next morning, when he met Flora on the shore just below the little garden, her eyes were red with weeping.

They could not be alone in these narrow, winding ways between the beechen-wood and the sea, so they took the first steep path that led upwards. Cool and fragrant were these glades and close-set spinneys of larch and pine, just above the unruffled bay ! The wide world could surely show no sweeter place. To-day as always, it was all the more poetic and soothing for the absence of intense colour, and sharp lights and shadows. A subdued, twilight radiance wraps this fair island, fair perhaps as the Edens described for us by pearl-diver in Indian seas. The flowers of the hanging-gardens are of hardy northern growth, yet they fling

a rich mantle about the nether parts of the ancient forest, and deep and sombre were the forest shadows above. No turquoise sea, no golden sands, no dazzling heavens here; every scene we gaze on rests alike the eye and the mind.

Little heed, however, paid poor weeping Flora to the delicious world she had waked up to that morning. She was with Hervey, sitting beside him on the very bench they had chosen during their first walk together. He was her own true friend, to be the husband of her choice; yet she was crying now as if her little heart would break.

And at last the disconcerted lover got out the reason. This was to be a parting. That very day Elizabeth was going to take her away.

‘Not on account of what you said to

me last night,' Flora got out between her sobs, 'Elizabeth seemed hardly vexed, hardly astonished even ; but something else has happened—I may not tell you what now—and in consequence everything is settled. We are to leave the island this very afternoon.'

'I will see your sister. She cannot refuse to hear what I have to say,' Hervey cried. 'Or I have a better plan still. I shall go with you.'

The meaning of a lover began to dawn upon Flora's artless mind in right good earnest. Hervey, then, would cling to her, whatever might happen. Love did not mean only a stolen kiss, and the sweet confidences of two, but a bond, a duty, a fellowship that, once called into existence, would tell upon every incident of life. Her sorrows, her joys, her com-

mon days were no longer her own. Love made them Hervey's business also. Even Elizabeth would not have it otherwise.

‘Go with you, or follow after, if your sister offers any objection to the first plan,’ Hervey went on. ‘The road to Bremen lies open to all. She may refuse my escort. She cannot forbid the railway to give me accommodation.’

He was smiling and confident, in spite of Flora's distress, not able, indeed, to see why an abrupt departure need prove a terrible misfortune. Were there not country lanes and rustic stiles inviting to lover-like confabulations outside this island? Arthur might make what comments he pleased. He should at once make ready for his journey.

‘We are not going straight home,’ Flora

said. ‘Elizabeth wishes me to have more sea-bathing. We shall stop for a week or two on the opposite coast.’

She had brightened as she heard, yet he could see that one sorrow he had not touched. Why such mysteriousness on Elizabeth’s part—this sudden breaking up of a summer holiday? He looked the questions he could not venture to put even to his betrothed.

‘Elizabeth will say nothing as to the reason of our departure, and you must put no questions to her,’ Flora went on. ‘She has other things to think of just now besides our affairs. I am not quite sure that she would object to your company. She seems terribly cast down.’

‘I fear sad tidings have reached you from home,’ at last said the young man, kindly, with almost brother-like solicitude

—no curiosity, only a desire to be serviceable, prompted the speech.

‘Not from home,’ Flora said, flushed and tearful. ‘But I dare not say a word more. Perhaps Elizabeth will confide in you. Let us both go to her.’

Hervey jumped from his seat with alacrity. Yes, that was the best thing to do, he said. There was always a good deal to think of before a hurried departure. He could put his own belongings together in a quarter of an hour. For the present he placed himself entirely at the sisters’ service.

They lingered under the beechen shadow for a whisper, a hand-clasp, a fond look, then went back to the little villa in the rose-garden. It was the favourite hour for bathing, and the place seemed deserted alike within and without, not an occupant

in any of the tiny summer-houses perched above the sea, not a sound indoors save of brooms being lustily plied in the upper chamber.

Flora led her companion to the parlour now familiar to him, but how changed its aspect from yesterday !

No pretty work-basket, no posies of freshly-culled wild-flowers, no water-colour drawings, no books—on all sides that unmistakable bareness and coldness of the sea-side lodging, the habitation that belongs to nobody. Beneath the window stood a huge trunk with open lid, showing all kinds of hastily-packed feminine treasures ; but, evidently wearied ere her task was done, Elizabeth had thrown herself on the sofa. There Flora and Hervey found her, pale, overcome with bodily lassitude and dejection.

‘Mr. Venning wants to know if he can be of use to us,’ Flora said, quite cheerfully; it was wonderful how Hervey’s view of the question inspirited and emboldened her. ‘May he not come in?’

Elizabeth looked almost too wearied to open her lips. She tried to smile, however, and, sitting up, began to give instructions. Hervey had ever been a favourite with her, and she liked this unaffected good-nature and alacrity to serve. Whilst Flora bustled about in the next room, she set him several tasks—to secure two places in the steamer starting for the opposite shore that afternoon, to see to the transport of luggage on board, to run hither and thither for the paying of the visitors’ tax, and deposit an address at the post-office; all these matters would

now be well off her mind, and she thanked her henchman beforehand.

‘I am grieved to leave this sweet place in the middle of our summer holiday,’ she said. ‘We have had happy days together, Mr. Venning. I shall often think of them.’

Hervey stood before the pale girl, hat in hand, not looking in the least like a lover about to be separated from his mistress, much less dismissed altogether. Elizabeth could not understand this apparent indifference, almost stolidness, on the part of Flora’s faithful knight. Flora’s briskness puzzled her still more.

An hour before the child had seemed as near despair as eighteen years can be ; now she was making ready for departure without a sign of reluctance.

‘Flora has spoken to me of your wishes,’

Elizabeth went on, with calm decision ; ' but I cannot think of her prospects now. She must not build too much on hope.' Then, suddenly overcome with the bitterness of unspoken sorrow, she rested her head on the sofa pillow, and her utterance became thick with tears. ' It would make me very happy to see Flora happy with you.' Here she held out her hand, which the young man clasped brother-like. ' You are kind and loyal, I feel sure, and would be good to my poor little sister. But you are an English gentleman—none so proud, they say. You would never wed a girl with a tarnished name, ally yourself with a family dishonoured for ever and for ever !'

Hervey spoke out bluntly, after true British fashion.

' What family escutcheon without its

blot?' he said. 'A man marries the woman he loves, and he loves her the better, not the worse, because of misfortune. Trust me with Flora's happiness—it shall be safe in my keeping, let her kinsfolk be what they may.'

'You have a generous heart,' murmured Elizabeth. 'I feel drawn towards you as to a brother, yet I must not let you win my Flora's love till you know all. I wish I could unburden myself to you now, but I am too weary in body and in spirit. I had hardly any sleep last night,' she added, wistfully.

'Do not undertake this journey to-day, then. Rest till to-morrow,' Hervey said, overcome with affectionate concern for the pale, overwrought girl. 'The delay of one day can surely be of no moment.'

'You are wrong,' cried Elizabeth, rising

from her seat with sudden animation, a feverish brightness in her eyes and on her cheek. ‘Dear friend—brother, if you will that I call you so—do not try to persuade me to stay. I shall get no more rest here. I came to seek a little happiness, a spell of oblivion, but the shadow that hangs over our house—the shadow whose name is shame—follows us wherever we go. There is a fatality about this island. Help me to hasten away, and you will be my kindest friend.’

‘Of course you must leave, if you wish it, by this afternoon’s boat,’ Hervey said, in a pleasant, matter-of-fact voice. ‘But I cannot let you undertake this troublesome journey without escort. I leave this island, then, to-day, as well as you.’

‘What will your brother say? And idlers here may gossip unkindly,’ Eliza-

beth urged, after a momentary indecision.

‘Arthur has no right to say anything. The rest can but make a hazard at the truth,’ Hervey said. ‘What other construction should be put upon such a step but the right one? Your sister’s future husband may surely accompany you home, and, when you leave the sea, I go with you there.’

‘Home, home!’ cried Elizabeth, with an unutterable look of anguish. ‘Little it is of a home we have now, my poor Flora and I.’

‘Then we will all three make one together,’ answered Hervey, astonished at his own audacity. ‘So now I must go and arrange everything for our journey.’

When Hervey was gone, Elizabeth once more rested on the sofa with the listless aspect of one whose powers of endurance

have been cruelly overtaxed. The beautiful glow of health and vivaciousness had vanished. Yet the high-spirited girl was suffering from no bodily weariness, only a mental shock had wrought the change.

As she lay thus passive amid so many claims upon her time and attention, something like a smile at last lighted up her pale face. Yes, Hervey's honest declaration was a ray of sunshine in the gloom ! Flora the bride of an honourable English gentleman, in Flora the family fortunes edified, the family honour vindicated. This seemed indeed cheering to think of, Elizabeth was leaving Arthur, perhaps without a word of farewell, but the prospect hardly dismayed, much less grieved her just now. Concerning her own future, she could not speculate at all.

Only to place the sea between her and the love like hate, the clinging misery, the shadow from which there seemed no escape !

CHAPTER XX.

IN COUNSEL.

ARTHUR was quietly sketching from his chamber window when Hervey dashed in, after the merest pretence at a knock. The elder brother never went through this formality with his junior, but Arthur was an Etonian whilst Hervey still wore petticoats, and an assumption of superiority had still been kept up in little things. Arthur, moreover, earned money, Hervey did not; a quite sufficient reason for any amount of outward respect.

‘I fear I am disturbing you,’ Hervey began. ‘But I have something to say. Elizabeth and Flora are going away this afternoon, and I intend to accompany them.’

Arthur looked up quietly from his sketch-book.

‘I hope you will have a pleasant journey,’ was all he said, in the tone Hervey knew so well.

His motives were seen through, and his brother was inwardly making merry at his expense.

Hervey waited for a moment to see what else Arthur would say, but Arthur’s mood seemed uncommonly curt just then.

‘The steamer starts at three o’clock,’ began Hervey, not easily checked or put out of countenance.

‘A very convenient hour. You will have time for dinner,’ was the reply.

‘I do not think Flora and her sister will dine at the hotel to-day. They have much to do and to think of at the last moment.’

‘Naturally,’ Arthur made answer, whilst he carelessly plied his paint-brush.

No surprise, no inquiry concerning such precipitate departure. Hervey could not in the least account for this provoking behaviour on Arthur’s part. He must feel curiosity in any matter that regarded Elizabeth. Not to believe so was in thought to insult his own brother. Had not Arthur devoted himself to Elizabeth during these past weeks as exclusively as he had been devoted to Flora? And Arthur might be many things Hervey did

not yet expect. He could never be mean, above all to a woman.

‘We are not coming back to the island,’ he said at last, thinking that this speech must elicit one in return. Arthur merely made answer, as he held up his drawing to the light,

‘It would hardly be worth while.’

This was too much. Hervey almost glared at his brother as he blurted forth,

‘I may as well tell you that I am going to marry Flora.’

‘Now, really, Hervey.’

Arthur at last put down his sketch-book, good-naturedly resigning himself to a spoiled morning, perhaps a spoiled subject.

‘Now really.’

‘I shall write for the newspapers,’ Hervey began, stoutly and apologetically,

‘and you know that German notions are very different from English ones. Flora will cheerfully keep house on less money than an English girl would spend on æsthetics.’

‘You won’t have much of a margin for æsthetics, certainly,’ the elder brother said, lazily ironic. ‘Tell me now, have you a hundred pounds in the bank?’

The culprit had not a word to say.

‘We can live in lodgings for the first year or two,’ he said at last.

‘Of course I have nothing to say in the matter, nothing whatever,’ Arthur went on. ‘I am not sure that a struggling life would do you any harm for a time, and money is to be made by the newspapers. But’—and here he leaned back in his chair and quietly eyed his brother.

‘But, Hervey, marriage is not a luxury to be purchased for a sum down. Have you thought of that? The man who marries goes to sea without a compass. One year’s expenses is no sort of guide for those of the next. I should not like you to blow your brains out because the butcher had dunned you for his bill.’

Hervey laughed. Arthur had taken the matter so much more agreeably than he expected.

‘We should probably live in the country. There are places even in England, charming too, where people can live upon next to nothing.’

‘How about the newspapers? If you mean to give up London, there is no help for you but to turn curate. Any jackanapes can preach a sermon.’

Again Hervey laughed in the best possible humour. He was so boyishly, naïvely happy, that Arthur might make what fun of him he would.

‘Well,’ he said, with the consciousness of a wise utterance. ‘Fortunately newspapers no more than pulpits require Aristotles. The business of the world is for the most part done by nobodies like myself.’

‘On my word, you are becoming quite witty! I think I must fall in love too,’ Arthur made answer, and what with his brother’s genial mood and his own exhilaration Hervey could not for the life of him keep back a speech that spoiled all, the first impertinent speech he had made to his senior in his life.

‘I suppose you are going to marry Elizabeth,’ he said, looking straight into

the other's face. The words were no sooner out than Hervey saw how deeply they were resented. Intense annoyance was written on Arthur's pleasant face. He took up his sketch-book and fiercely plied the discarded brush.

‘ You suppose! You suppose! How can I help what you suppose? Be as suppositious as you please. Are we bound to make good every fool's suppositions?’

‘ You are complimentary this morning,’ Hervey said, with unassailable good humour, trying to laugh away his blunder.

‘ Do let us have done with personalities. We might all have the temper of angels but for personalities,’ Arthur answered, returning to the aggressive words as if one buffet had not laid them low enough.
‘ Personalities strip off the last rag of

civilization and take us back to the deluge.'

Hervey stood by the door willing enough to cut short this unpromising talk, but he was too disturbed to go away without eliciting a word of explanation. Arthur could not look upon the intercourse of the past three months as a mere midsummer flirtation? Such Elizabeth certainly did not regard it.

'One can but put two and two together,' he said, pleasantly, hoping thus to make all things smooth.

'Of course everyone has a perfect right to put two and two together,' Arthur retorted, savagely, 'but for Heaven's sake keep the application of your mental arithmetic to your own affairs.'

Hervey yet lingered irresolute. The bare notion of a misunderstanding with

his brother was hateful to him. The pair had never quarrelled in their lives. But zeal on behalf of his future sister-in-law led him into the committal of one blunder more.

‘I could not help believing that you and Elizabeth understood each other,’ he stammered forth.

That speech was the unluckiest Hervey had made during the entire conversation. Arthur was now really angry, for if his brother’s words meant anything at all they indicated the kind of reproach most stinging to a proud man. Hervey then, and if Hervey, why not every soul here, had watched his behaviour towards Elizabeth, and had come to the conclusion that it was of a compromising nature. He saw also himself brought to the bar of public opinion, his actions common property, the

arrangement of his future life no longer a matter of individual concernment. And the worst of this odious position was that his own brother, his junior, was sitting in judgment against him. He cut short the confabulation with an epigram that made poor Hervey feel how painful their relations had on a sudden become.

‘If everybody could help believing that he best understood his neighbour’s affairs, the world would be a tolerable place,’ he said, and bent his head over his drawing, evidently determined to say no more.

‘I had better go and finish my packing,’ Hervey made quiet answer; then he went to his own room, feeling bitter enough.

They should meet at dinner. Arthur would be at the landing-place, to take courteous leave; there would be no visible estrangement. But for a long time to

come their intercourse was spoiled. The coming separation gave an intense feeling of relief, and, to Hervey's boyish, affectionate nature, the sense of Flora's nearness came as a sweet consolation. He had at least one friend to confide in, one person in the world who would never silence him with an epigram.

The cause of this embittered feeling troubled Hervey most of all, for he must now believe that Elizabeth's fascination over Arthur had been transitory only, a mere summer sentiment, destined to pass away with the roses and zephyrs. Elizabeth was as unapproachable as Arthur. To Flora and himself, she would never, he felt sure, open her lips on this subject. Arthur's want of depth, want of loyalty even, would be locked within her own breast, and no one would ever

learn what had in reality passed between them. It was characteristic of Hervey, as it is of most mortal kind, that he was lamenting a brother's purely hypothetical lapse. Like many another, Arthur Venning was being blamed merely for not doing the thing the world expected him to do; so lamentably most of us forget that the exercise of judgment is a matter of accurately weighing, or casting up. Leave out a thimbleful or a fraction, and what will our reckoning be worth ?

CHAPTER XXI.

TILL WE MEET AGAIN !

HERVEY was right so far. Arthur had too much self-command and self-respect to betray his ruffled humour, and even towards himself, at the dinner-table, he showed no acerbity. He was cold and taciturn. That was all.

But on the landing-place he felt bound to be friendly; and if his face were less animated, and his voice less genial than usual, at least neither Elizabeth nor Flora could have guessed what had taken place between the brothers.

‘You have indeed taken us by surprise,’ he said, pleasantly, as all stood on the little wooden landing-place, surrounded by acquaintances. ‘The summer will last yet a few weeks longer.’

Elizabeth coloured painfully.

‘We had no idea of leaving so soon till yesterday,’ she answered. ‘But it must be.’

‘This is not a farewell,’ Arthur answered, in the same cheery, every-day voice. ‘Who could help coming a second time to our island? And, if not here, we are sure to meet elsewhere. Rhine-land, Goetheland, the Black Forest, is not each a second England at certain seasons of the year?’

‘And our island friends will ever be welcome to Bremen,’ Elizabeth said, glancing from Arthur to others standing near.

The girl was strangely animated, almost excited; evidently thankful to go, yet—could it be otherwise?—almost heart-broken at the interruption of such a summer holiday.

‘Then it is understood. We are to meet at Bremen,’ Arthur added, perhaps with hidden meaning, intended for Elizabeth’s ears only. ‘Bremen, at least, is accessible all the year round.’

‘Oh, do not reproach this sweet place,’ cried Elizabeth. ‘If the summer here is shorter than anywhere in the wide world, is it not, by compensation, sweeter?’

‘That I admit unreservedly,’ Arthur made gallant reply; he was talking not only to Elizabeth, but to twenty, and Hervey was standing close by. Exerting himself to be off-hand, yet friendly, perhaps all the time feeling that Elizabeth

took in a deeper meaning, he added—
‘There can surely be but one island and
one summer in our recollections henceforth
and for ever.’

The final signal for embarking was now given, and the boat waited to take Hervey and his charges alongside. Amid the general leave-taking, the brothers shook hands after frigid English fashion.

‘What shall I do with your letters?’
asked Arthur.

‘Keep them till I write from Bremen, if
you please,’ was the equally cold retort.

Hervey saw with what difficulty Elizabeth maintained self-composure at the last. Yes, his mind was made up. His elder brother was behaving heartlessly to this sweet girl. She could never, never be the Elizabeth of old, and all through fault of his.

‘Well, I suppose you will turn up in Cheyne Walk some time or other,’ Arthur said, as Hervey settled himself in the boat.

‘I suppose so,’ was all the other said.

The stalwart boatmen now put their hands rhythmically to the rowlocks, the pellucid waves showed crisp white curls, the upturned faces of the passengers stood out between bright sea and sky in strong relief, and the boat moved off amid waving of handkerchiefs and a chorus of German voices.

‘Till we meet again ! till we meet again !’

Arthur lingered on the little wooden landing-place till the empty boat had returned, and the steamer was fairly on its way; then he went back to his quarters with a feeling of mingled reproach and relief. He had sedulously avoided making

acquaintance on the island, and now derived inexpressible satisfaction from the fact of being alone. None to pry into his motives, none to comment on his doings. He was as sorry as could be to have hurt Hervey's feelings, but why would he meddle with things that did not concern him, and with affairs, above all others, which concerned a man's self alone ?

For criticism in general Arthur cared not a straw. People might say what they chose about his writings, his sketches, his manner of life, himself ; but to be criticised in the matter of liking and sentiment, in the matter of feeling for a woman —that was past all endurance. Hervey ought to have shown more reticence, more delicacy, at any rate, more knowledge of the world. Well, the sea now separated them, and by the time they should meet

again all soreness would be healed! Hervey might commit this romantic piece of folly if he chose, and take to himself a portionless bride ere he had set to work in right good earnest to win his bread. It would be his own part as elder brother to help him all he could. Certainly no word of reproach should ever pass his lips. He might do so much worse than marry a simple German girl, who would make her own gowns, and not require half her husband's income for the pursuit of æsthetics. This pretty little Flora would make a very safe sister-in-law indeed, and safety is the first virtue in relations.

With a certain sense of relief, also, he thought of his own affairs. All was now crystal clear between Elizabeth and himself. Scripture was no plainer than her downright utterances of two days ago.

She liked him—he was her friend ; but her heart was not free to love. Another feeling, all bitterness, which yet he must believe had been joy unalloyed once, shut out others for a time. She could but shake off this sorrow before looking hopefully forward. He was bound to accept her decision, which lent itself to no misinterpretation. For a time, a period to which she had put no limits, they were to be friends, and nothing more. In other words, both were absolutely free.

But for Elizabeth's passionate confessions of the other day, Arthur must have determined upon a wholly different line of conduct. He was a scrupulously honourable man. The notion of behaving meanly to a woman was as odious to him as that of criminal dishonesty in affairs of business. He had made love to Elizabeth.

But for her naïve outpouring, he should have followed Hervey's example. No other course would have occurred to him, although—— That unwelcome although ! How many a man has found himself in Arthur's dilemma, falling in love twice, and the second time too late ! How many a man thus situated, rather than behave unhandsomely to a sentimental girl, has straightway pledged himself to a thankless bond, an affection that is but duty, and for life long !

There was no fickleness in Arthur's disposition ; he was loyalty itself. But the image of Elizabeth had straightway been eclipsed by one infinitely lovelier, and yet, in some strange way, recalling her own. There were glances, smiles, and aspects of this sweet Elizabeth that recalled a dozen times a day the dazzling creature whose sister she might well be.

If inconstancy were here, Elizabeth must surely pardon it, since in adoring this stranger he seemed to adore her second self. Arthur therefore, in these first moments of a mood that approached exultation, was alive to the precise, prosaic state of affairs. Elizabeth had refused, or at least silenced him. Elizabeth was gone, and he felt glad. Glad for two reasons; first of all, because he could not bear the thought of forcing on her acceptance an affection charged with a heavy lien, and, secondly, because he was, in sooth, bound hand and foot by another fancy. He had loved Elizabeth as fondly as an honest man can love a sweet girl till just two weeks ago. Since that time he had learned the meaning of a strange word. He could now understand the desperate scot men pay to passion.

It was therefore with a glad sense of disentanglement and relief that he saw the last puff of smoke fade from view, and returned to betake himself to his usual pursuits. Few Englishmen but rejoice at some time or other in the sense of utter isolation. We like to be in a place where we may be married, or, for the matter of that, buried without causing an approach to a flutter. This exaggerated kind of reaction against personal vanity it is that impels men to abandon hearth and duty for the mere sake of escaping identity, fleeing from the self so terrible when reflected in the opinion of one's neighbours !

Arthur was far from carrying his feelings to such a pitch, but he did now revel in this utter remoteness from the world that knew him. For a short space

he was to be ignored by society and his friends, as completely shut from view as reckless icemen blocked up in north seas. He knew for a certainty that there was no countryman or countrywoman of his on this island. In another week or two the German holiday-makers would begin to cross the sea. If he stayed a month longer, the chances were that he should have his little Paradise to himself. And one other !

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.







